This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NEW-YORK
SOCIETY
LIBRARY
1758

NCl

Pride

12/
DX

THE CHRONICLES OF DON Q.

Selected Fiction

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS
By Wilson Barrett
Illustrated. $1.50

OLIVE LATHAM
By E. L. Voynich
$1.50

THE ISSUE
By George Morgan
Illustrated. $1.50

AN ANGEL BY BREVET
By Helen Pitkin
Frontispiece. $1.50

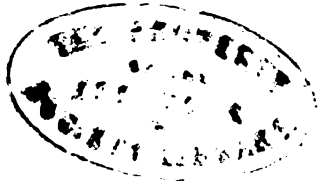
POKETOWN PEOPLE
By Ella Middleton Tybout
Illustrated in colors. $1.50

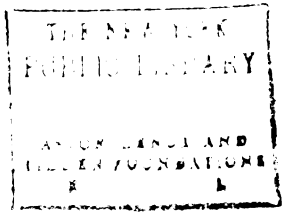
HEART OF LYNN
By Mary Stewart Cutting
Illustrated. $1.25

PIGS IN CLOVER
By Frank Danby
$1.50

A SEQUENCE IN HEARTS
By Mary Moss
$1.50

KITTY OF THE ROSES
By Ralph Henry Barbour
Illustrated in colors. In box, $2.00




THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

The Spaniard snatched off his hat and peered out over the end of the terrace.

THE CHRONICLES OF DON Q.

BY

K. AND HESKETH PRICHARD

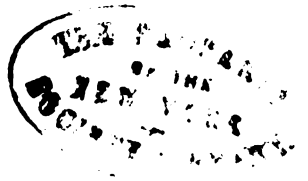
WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS

BY STANLEY L. WOOD

PHILADELPHIA

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1904



THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
129259B
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
1944 L

COPYRIGHT, 1904
BY THE PEARSON PUBLISHING COMPANY
COPYRIGHT, 1904
BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

Published November, 1904

Electrotyped and Printed by
J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, U. S. A.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Parole of Gevil-Hay	9
II.	The Parole of Gevil-Hay	21
III.	How Don Q. Dealt with Don Luis	29
IV.	How Don Q. Dealt with Don Luis	38
V.	How Don Q.'s Sword was Drawn for the Queen	48
VI.	How Don Q.'s Sword was Drawn for the Queen	58
VII.	The Ears of the Governor	75
VIII.	The Ears of the Governor	85
IX.	The Dark Brothers of the Civil Guard	105
X.	The Dark Brothers of the Civil Guard	117
XI.	A Three-cornered Game	130
XII.	A Three-cornered Game	141
XIII.	A King of Finance	157
XIV.	A King of Finance	166
XV.	A King of Finance	176
XVI.	How M. Blufort Painted for his Right Hand	184
XVII.	How M. Blufort Painted for his Right Hand	195
XVIII.	How M. Blufort Painted for his Right Hand	205

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	How Don Q. Paid for his Cigarettes.....	214
XX.	How Don Q. Paid for his Cigarettes.....	223
XXI.	How Don Q. Paid for his Cigarettes.....	233
XXII.	How Don Q. had Dealings with a Usurer..	243
XXIII.	How Don Q. had Dealings with a Usurer..	252
XXIV.	How Don Q. Fought for his Name.....	268
XXV.	How Don Q. Fought for his Name.....	281
XXVI.	How Don Q. Stood at Bay.....	290
XXVII.	How Don Q. Stood at Bay.....	303

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

The Spaniard snatched off his hat and peered out over the end of the terrace ..... *Frontispiece*

Don Luis was hauled up the face of the cliff 38

" Pardon, señor, my coat is black, but it can be pulled off! Also I can borrow a sword!" 60

" You are altogether mistaken," replied Don Q. . . . " the remainder of your life will hardly suffice for an interview such as ours!" 90

One of the brothers would be carrying a dead body slung across his horse 108

Don Q. led a body of his followers downwards towards the plains 142

" Be content, Estaban; my lord desires him," said Robledo softly 164

His captors were too quick for him 166

He wished himself . . . anywhere but here, tied on an ambling mule, and surrounded by half-a-dozen dirty but determined brigands 198

Gave it through the bars into Robledo's hands 262

Don Q. sat bleak and solitary upon his horse..... 272

" Called to Don Hugo to see how a traitor died!" 308

THE CHRONICLES OF DON Q.

CHAPTER I

THE PAROLE OF GEVIL-HAY

If you take a map of Spain and follow the Mediterranean coast, where, across the narrow seas, the mountains of Europe and the mountains of Africa stand up for ever one against the other, you will find on the Spanish side the broad line of the Andalusian highlands stretching from Jerez to Almeria and beyond. Here is a wild, houseless country of silent forest and evergreen thicket climbing up towards barren, sun-tortured heights. It is patched with surfaces of smooth rock, and ravines strewn with tumbled boulders; lined by almost untrodden mule tracks, and sparsely dotted with the bottle-shaped *chozas* of the charcoal-burners and the herdsmen.

The lord of this magnificent desolation was locally, though not officially, acknowledged to be a certain brigand chief, known far and wide as Don Q., an abbreviation of the nickname Quebranta-Huesos, which is, being interpreted, the bone-smasher, a name by which the *neophron* or bone-breaking vulture goes in those parts. In answer to any question as to where the bandit came from or when he began to harry the countryside, one was told that he had been there always, which, though manifestly untrue, was, nevertheless, as near an ap-

proach to historical accuracy as may be found on many a printed page.

For Don Q., though perhaps not endowed with the sempiternal quality, had many other attributes of mysterious greatness. Few had seen him, but all knew him and feared him, and most had felt his power; he had cognizance of what was said or done, or, indeed, even thought of, throughout the length and the breadth of the wild region over which he held sway. He dealt out reward and punishment with the same unsparing hand. If a goatherd pleased him, the fellow was made rich for life; but no man lived to bring him false information twice.

From his hidden abiding-place in the black rock, a hundred feet above the general camp of his followers, he was to the surrounding country as a poised hawk to a covey of partridges.

The stories of his savageries were brought down to the plains by leather-clad mountaineers, and occasional expeditions were sent up against him by those in authority in the towns. But every attempt failed, and the parties of *guardias civiles* came back fewer in numbers, having built cairns over their dead, leaving them near lonely shrines, amongst the ravens and the big ragged birds of the sierra.

From all this it will be seen that the brigand chief was not a common brand of cut-throat; in fact, he belonged to that highest class known as *sequestradores,* or robbers who hold to ransom; and, though his methods were considered unpleasant, he carried through most of his affairs with satisfaction to himself, for he was an exceptionally good man of business.

No doubt, if any individual were to set up in the same line of life within twenty miles of a good-

sized English or American town, the chances are that his career would end with something of suddenness. But in Spain it is always to-morrow, and the convenience of the system lies in the fact that there is always another to-morrow waiting to take up the deferred responsibilities. If Providence had seen fit to remove that fatal *mañana* from the Spanish vocabulary and the Spanish mind, the map might be differently coloured to-day.

A party of *civiles* had just returned from a particularly unlucky excursion into the mountains, and there was, therefore, the less excuse for the foolhardiness of Gevil-Hay, who declined to pay any heed to the warnings of H. B. M.'s consul on the seaboard or the deep hints of his host at the little inn under the mountains, but continued to pursue his journey across the sierra. He could not be brought to see why the will of a hill-thief should stand between him and his desire to wander where he liked.

Gevil-Hay's obstinacy sprang from a variety of causes. He was in bad health and worse spirits, and he had for the whole period of his manhood governed a small kingdom of wild and treacherous hill-men in the interests of the British Government, backed only by a handful of native police, and, what is more, had governed it with conspicuous success.

Besides, beneath a quiet exterior, Gevil-Hay was as hard to move as the nether millstone. After putting these facts together, it will not be difficult to see that when he started for his long solitary ride across the *Boca de Jabili* he only did what a man in his condition and with his temperament and experience would be likely to do.

He carried a revolver, it is true, but he found no use for it on a dim evening when something gripped his neck from behind. Indeed it was only after an interval that he understood vaguely how he came to be the centre of a hustling crowd of silent men who smelt offensively of garlic and leather. They tied him upon his horse and the party set their faces north-east towards the towering bulk of the higher sierra.

But for once in a way the spiders of Don Q. had taken a captive in their net of whom they could make nothing. In the dawn when they got him out of the cane-built hut in which they had passed the latter part of the night, they saw that he was tall and thin and rather stooped, with a statuesque face of extreme pallor. So far he was not so altogether uncommon. But the brigands were accustomed to see character come out strongly in similar circumstances, yet Gevil-Hay asked no questions, he evinced no trace of curiosity as to where they were taking him. He showed nothing but a cold indifference. A man in his position who asked no questions was a man of mark. He puzzled them.

The truth was that Gevil-Hay despised his warnings and took his ill-fortune in the same spirit of fatalism. He had been an Indian Civil servant of good prospects and bad health. In the end the bad health proved the stronger, and his country retired him on a narrow income. He was unemotionally heartbroken. There was a woman somewhere in the past, a woman to whom the man's lonely heart had clung steadfastly through the years while health slowly and surely deserted him. "Love me little, love me long" has its corresponding lines set

deep throughout the character, and if Gevil-Hay was incapable of a passion of love or sorrow, he was not ignorant of the pang of a long renunciation and an enduring regret.

Don Q.'s men were no respecters of persons. The prisoner's reserve they finally put down to his being poor, probably deadly poor, for poverty is the commonest of all evils in Spain, and they treated him accordingly.

Rough handling and the keen winds of the upper sierra are not wholesome for a fever-shaken frame, but Gevil-Hay occupied himself with himself until he was brought into the presence of Don Q.

Late in the afternoon a halt was called, the prisoner was blindfolded and led through the scrub; then the wind blew more sharply in his face and Gevil-Hay knew that he trod on wiry grass, which in turn changed to a surface of bare echoing rock. Passing out of this tunnel he was secured by having his hands tied, and, when his eyes were uncovered, he found himself in a small enclosed valley with sheer precipitous sides. The ground was furred with coarse grass, but there were thickets of flowering shrubs on the higher ledges and a backing of wind-blown pines.

A couple of men hurried him up a winding pathway cut out of the cliff-face to the mouth of a cave, fronting which was a little natural terrace.

There they found Don Q., sitting in the sunshine, with a wide hat of felt drawn over his brows. Gevil-Hay saw nothing vulture-like but one lean hand like a delicate yellow claw that held the cloak about his neck.

"To whom have I the pleasure to address my-

self?" asked the brigand, with extreme and unexpected politeness.

Gevil-Hay's hands being loosed, he fixed his single eye-glass and glanced round the glen before he replied.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to give me some idea of your career, and we can go into the question of the ransom at the end of it," resumed Don Q. in his courteous manner, as the other finished speaking.

Gevil-Hay answered briefly in good Spanish, for an Indian civilian is supposed to start in life equipped with a knowledge of every language under the sun.

"Ah, then you have retired—well, been forced to retire—but with a pension? Yes!"

"Yes."

Don Q., like all other foreigners, entertained extravagant ideas as to the lavishness of the English Government. Perhaps by comparison it *is* lavish.

"How much?" he asked.

"£300 a year."

"Ah," the brigand hesitated while he made a mental calculation. "Your ransom, señor——" he stopped, he understood how to make a judicious use of suspense.

In the pause a shot re-echoed through the ravine, followed by a sound of loud, sudden brawling immediately below.

The Spaniard snatched off his hat and peered out over the end of the terrace. His cloak lay about him like a vulture's tumbled plumage, as he turned his face over his shoulder to listen with outstretched neck.

Then for the first time Gevil-Hay saw his face clearly, the livid, wrinkled eyelids, the white wedge-shaped bald head narrowing down to the hooked nose, the lean neck, the cruel aspect, all the distinctive features of the *quebranta-huesos* transmuted into human likeness.

A few sharp sibilant words hissed down the cliff, and the two swarthy quarrellers below fell apart with a simultaneous upward look of apprehension.

"Your punishment waits, my children," said the chief gently. "Go!"

The ruffians slunk away. They were curiously cowed and by a word. It was an object lesson to Gevil-Hay, and perhaps the brigand watched him covertly to see how he would take it. But the prisoner's calm face gave no sign.

"Señor," said Don Q., "you are a poor man you say, and you are lucky in that I believe you. I will name but a moderate sum, and after this conversation there will be no more about it. We will omit the subject while you remain my guest." The soft speech grew softer.

"There is no need to give my position a false name," answered Gevil-Hay; "I am your prisoner. Misfortune introduced us."

Above all things created, a man who defied him was abhorrent to the brigand, but now he saw one who looked him in the eyes without either fear or curiosity. Gevil-Hay interested him, but rather as a frog interests a vivisector.

"On one thing I pride myself, señor," he said presently. "When I speak, the thing which I say is unalterable. I am about to tell you the amount of your ransom. I will contrive to send down your message."

"You will have to give me time if you wish to get the money," said the other. "I have only my pension, and I must see if they will commute that."

"Your Government will pay," asserted Don Q. suavely. "They will not lose so valuable a servant."

"Do you care for a worn-out coat?" asked Gevil-Hay with a mirthless laugh. "Besides, I came here in spite of warnings that the roads were unsafe. I must bear the consequences."

Don Q.'s wrinkled eyelids quivered.

"Shall we say twenty thousand dollars?" he asked, as if deferring to his prisoner's opinion.

"You have said it, and that's the end," returned Gevil-Hay; "though," he added, "I don't think you are ever likely to see it. They will commute my pension on the scale of the probable duration of my life, and that will give no satisfactory average, I am afraid. I hope you may get fifteen thousand dollars. I doubt if you will get more."

"I trust for your sake I may get twenty thousand," replied the Spaniard, "otherwise a disappointment might lead to consequences—regrettable consequences."

He shook his head and blinked as he withdrew into the cave.

Meanwhile Gevil-Hay wrote out his appeal and a request to Ingham, the consul at the seaport under the mountains, that he would urge the matter forward. Then he sat and drearily watched the evening wind in the pines above the gorge, and wished vainly that he could do anything—anything but watch and wait.

It is a bad moment when a man believes his

days of action are past, while his brain works strong and resolute as ever! He longed to beat the brigand at his own game, for he fancied he was a man worth beating.

In the gloom, when the fire was lit outside the cave, Don Q. returned. He took the sealed letter that Gevil-Hay held ready for dispatch.

"And now, señor, I regard you as my guest," said he; "and in all things but one you may command me. I assure you I will do my best to play the host well and to make your stay among us pleasant to you. I have your parole, señor?"

Gevil-Hay hesitated. The fever had laid its hand upon him, he shivered as he stood in the breeze, and the joints of his knees were unloosed with a creeping weakness. Not so many years ago the world seemed at his feet; he had striven hard for his position and won it—won more than that. He had tasted much of life's sweetness and the joy of power and growing success, yet to-day——

"Yes," he answered.

As the days went on Gevil-Hay found he had a good deal in common with the chief, who proved himself an attentive host. There was something kindred between the two men, and yet Gevil-Hay was alternately attracted and repelled.

Yielding to the charm of Don Q.'s fine courtesy he was led on to talk of many things, and he talked well, while the chilly thin-framed hearer, crouching in his cloak over the fire, listened with interest to a later view of the great world than lay within his own remembrance. Also the Englishman had been a wanderer in far countries; he was a man who spoke with authority, who understood the craft of administration and high affairs, so that he could

converse on the level of actual knowledge and experience with one who held himself to be also a ruler and a lawgiver to no contemptible portion of mankind.

To Gevil-Hay Don Q. was a study. He watched him as a snake might be watched by an imaginative rabbit. He was always following the livid-lidded eyes, always speculating on the thoughts which worked in that ill-balanced brain. For Don Q. was a Spaniard of the Spaniards, having the qualities of his race in excess. He was quite fearless, proud to distraction, unsurpassed in the kindly courtesy of a nation of aristocrats, and cruel beyond belief. As this character developed itself, Gevil-Hay, like many another man who has thought himself tired of life, clung to his chances of escape as they hourly grew less before his eyes. For one thing was apparent—Don Q.'s peculiarities did not lean to the side of mercy.

A couple of days after his arrival in the glen he asked the brigand chief what had been done with the two young brawlers who had drawn knives upon each other under the terrace.

Don Q. removed his cigarette to answer.

"They will annoy you no more, señor," he said, with the anxiety of hospitality, "no more."

"What? Have you sent them away to some of your out-lying detachments?" asked Gevil-Hay, for he had learned by this time that the robbers were posted at many points in the mountains.

Don Q. laughed, a venomous sibilant laugh.

"They are gone—yes, with other carrion—the vultures alone know where!"

The chief was in one of his black moods of intense and brooding melancholy. They were common with

him, but this was the first which Gevil-Hay had seen.

It suddenly struck him that some leaven of insanity might lurk behind the fierce, bird-like aspect. No wonder his followers obeyed him at the run. His generosity and his vengeance were out of all proportion to the deserving.

"Some day," said Gevil-Hay abruptly, "they will resent—this kind of thing. There are many ways; they might betray you, and then——"

Don Q. gave him a poisonous glance.

"I have made provision for that also; but no, señor, when I die, it shall be in my own manner and of my own will," and he relapsed again into musing.

It was then that Gevil-Hay found himself wishing his ransom might arrive in full, and wishing it with fervour. In a few minutes Don Q. spoke again.

"If you own a dog, he may love you; but a pack of wolves are kept in order with the lash. These," he waved his hand towards the gleaming camp fires in the hollow, "*are* wolves. Also many men desire to join us—many more than I care to take. So you perceive, señor, I can afford to lose a few who offend me."

He rose as he spoke, and, going back into the cave, brought forth his guitar.

"After all, what is life, that we should prize it so?" he asked, as his thin fingers touched the strings. "I live up here, feared and obeyed to satiety. Sometimes I have the honour of a gentleman's companionship, as I now have the honour of yours, señor. At other times I grow weary of life, and my restlessness drives me down the mountains; but —at all times I love the music of Spain."

Gevil-Hay looked askance at the guitar. Music was not one of the things for which he could declare any special fancy.

Don Q. placed his open palm across the twanging notes.

"If it displeases you," he said apologetically.

Gevil-Hay hastened to assure him to the contrary. And, indeed, if the listener had had the power of appreciation, he must have been touched and charmed, for Don Q.'s was a master hand. He lingered over mournful Andalusian melodies, and even sang in his strange sibilant voice long sad songs of old Spain and forgotten deeds and men.

CHAPTER II

THE PAROLE OF GEVIL-HAY

So the days wore on, but one evening there was a new development.

Gevil-Hay, secured only by his parole, was allowed to wander at large about the glen, and on this occasion, after an ugly climb, he arrived at the head of a deep and narrow cleft in the higher rocks along the bottom of which a faint track was visible. As he stood and surveyed it with an involuntary thought of escape, he heard his name spoken. Of course it was some hidden sentinel, but he was surprised when the man repeated his call, in the same low voice, for Don Q.'s men were usually sullen. In their eyes a prisoner had but two uses. First he was saleable; second, if unsaleable, it was amusing to see him die.

"What do you want?" asked Gevil-Hay after a little hesitation.

"The thing I say must be for ever between us two alone. You can help us, we can help you. That is the reason of my speaking. No, señor, stay where you are. If you promise, I will show you my face."

"I promise nothing."

"Ah, that is because you have not yet heard! Is it not true that my lord of the sierra is taking from you all your riches?"

"Yes."

"And you, like the rest of us, would do something to save them? Is not that also so?"

"It may be."

"Then do it. It is but a little thing, and in the doing should taste sweet. You will not betray me?"

"As I have not seen you I cannot."

"But you will not?"

"No."

"Then take it, señor. Here, look up towards the lentisco."

In the warm gloom of the lentisco shrub something cold and ominous passed from hand to hand, and Gevil-Hay's fingers closed on the butt of a revolver.

"You mean me to kill him?" he said slowly.

A laugh was the answer, and words followed the laugh.

"Yes, for you have opportunity. Then you shall go free, for we hate him."

"And you?"

There was another laugh.

"A pardon and the blood-money between us. Now go."

And it cannot be denied that in the soft southern dusk Charles Gerald Gevil-Hay was horribly tempted. He stood there in the silence and wrestled with the temptation. Arguments came to him freely. By firing that shot he would be serving his kind as well as himself. Tormented with thoughts he slid back into the glen and walked across the short, hard grass towards the terrace. He passed by the fires round which the men were gambling. Lean columns of smoke rose slowly into the higher air, strange cries filled the glen, for the *sequestradores* played high, and each voice rose and fell with its possessor's luck.

He mounted the sloping path to the terrace. Don Q., unsuspecting, was within the cave reading

letters beside a cheap lamp. How easy—— Gevil-Hay stood outside in the herb-scented darkness and watched him. On the one side, the prisoner could look forward to a life of comfort at the least; and who could tell what else the future held? On the other hand, a hideous beggary in smoky, fish-scented lodgings, an existence worse than death! And in the night the man's honour wrestled with the man's temptations of expediency.

Presently he went in. Don Q. scowled at him and threw him an English newspaper. It was fourteen days old, and not one which Gevil-Hay was wont to buy when at home; but in the whirl of his thoughts he fled to it as to a refuge. He was about to open it, holding it at arm's length for the purpose, when his glance lit upon a notice in the obituary column.

"Hertford.—On March 10th, suddenly, at Frane Hall, Franebridge, George Chigwell Aberstone Hertford, eldest son of the late——"

He folded the paper with mathematical precision and read two columns of advertisements without seeing a word of what he read.

So George Hertford was dead at last! And Helen—free.

Don Q. looked furtively at him under the shadow of his wide hat, and saw that *El Palido,* as the men called him, was sitting there more white and more statuesque than ever. His eyes were blank and set. By his tense attitude Don Q. knew that some struggle was going on within the Englishman's mind, and his own face filled with an ominous light as he glanced at one of his letters.

"Señor," he said aloud, in a changed voice, "news

of your ransom has come. Eighteen thousand dollars. I said twenty thousand."

Gevil-Hay started slightly, controlled himself, and said unconcernedly,—

"And so?"

"And so, señor, I am prepared to stand by my side of the bargain," replied the chief with a poisonous politeness. "At the rising of the moon nine-tenths of you shall go free from the head of our glen!"

There was a silence, broken only by the noises in the camp.

Free? Gevil-Hay's thoughts were racing through his brain. Yes, free, and—Helen was free! Her husband dead. Then he took in the force of Don Q.'s words, and, rising, stood up and leaned against the rocky wall.

"Am I to be grateful?" he asked frigidly.

Don Q. smiled with a suave acquiescence.

"And because your conversation has interested me, señor, you shall have the privilege of choosing which tenth of yourself you will leave behind."

"In fact, not content with making me a beggar you will take from me all chance of regaining my losses?"

Don Q. bowed again and spoke with exceeding gentleness.

"It comes to that. I am very much afraid it comes to that," he said. "It is terribly unfortunate, I admit, but I do not see how it can be avoided. But you are a comparatively heavy man, señor; I think I should advise you to leave a limb behind you. One can yet live without a limb."

The brigand's callousness startled Gevil-Hay, well as he fancied he knew him. And in the breast of the

slow-moving, phlegmatic man the temptation arose again with accumulated strength. A loaded revolver was under his hand, practical impunity waited upon the deed, and beyond that life—and Helen! What stood between him and all this? Why, a scruple, a scruple that should not hold good for a moment against such counteracting motives. It occurred to him with much force that the thin, bald-browed, malignant despot opposite would be much more wholesome of contemplation were his lips closed for ever.

But he had passed his word, given his parole, and a man occasionally finds his honour an inconvenient possession.

Had it been a question of another man's life or person, Gevil-Hay would have had no hesitation in sending Don Q. to his appointed place. Moreover, he would have been delighted of the excuse for sending him there. As it was he held his hand.

In another hour he would be given over to the band for mutilation, and his talk in the dark with the sentinel, joined to his failure in making use of the opportunity offered him, would assuredly not lighten the manner of paying the penalty.

Through it all the bandit sat and watched him with blinking eyelids in the lamplight. Don Q.'s sight seemed not very good, but it served to show him what he wanted to see. He had broken down the indifference of Gevil-Hay.

But Gevil-Hay had not held himself well in hand during so many years of his life for nothing. He conquered now in the grimmest fight he had ever fought. But his soul rose at the man before him.

"I should certainly advise you to leave a limb," repeated Don Q. at last.

"You villain! You unutterable villain!"

Don Q.'s hand fell to his knife as he sprang to his feet and faced his captive.

"The one fact for which I am really sorry at this moment," went on Gevil-Hay, "is that I should have allowed such a thing as you to associate with me on equal terms! If I had guessed to what genus you belonged I would never have talked with you or remained near you except I had been held there by force! Now you know what I think of you, and I assure you, although I can guess the price I shall have to pay for the pleasure of saying so, it is cheap!"

Don Q.'s angled face was yellow. His figure shook. It must be remembered that Gevil-Hay had an exhaustive vocabulary of Spanish terms and knew the exact value of every word he distilled from the indignation within him. Also he had delivered his attack well and each word told.

The chief's livid eyelids were quivering.

"Señor, you have spoken as no man has ever spoken to me before," said Don Q., at last. "There are many ways of conducting those little scenes which lie between this moment and your departure. By the time the moon has risen it will be hard to recognize *El Palido!*"

There was a fierce significance in the last few words that at any other time might well have made Gevil-Hay's heart turn cold. But now with his blood up and the hopelessness of his position apparent, he merely turned his back with a stinging gesture of repulsion.

"You evil beast!" he repeated, "as long as I am not annoyed by the sight of you I can bear anything!"

So Gevil-Hay turned his back and stared out into the night. The noises below were hushed. The encampment was waiting for him—waiting—and for a third time temptation leaped upon him. And that was the worst spasm of all. When it left him, it left him exhausted. His mouth felt dry, his brow clammy.

He was still standing facing the opening of the cave, and after a pause a voice broke the silence.

"As you have a loaded revolver in your pocket, why do you not use it? Why do you not shoot me down, señor?"

"You know I could not," replied Gevil-Hay comprehensively.

"And are you not afraid of what is coming?"

Gevil-Hay turned and held out the revolver. Don Q.'s face was a study. He took no notice of the other's action, but asked—

"Because of your parole?"

He was answered by another question.

"How did you know about the revolver?"

"I instructed the man who gave it to you. I wished to see whether I had read you aright. Yet your inability to shoot me hurt you. Is not that so?"

"I wish I could do it now! At least there is no necessity for more talk between us. Maim me and let me go, or kill me! Only take away this revolver from me before I——"

Don Q. took the pistol and laid it with deliberation upon the table beside him, then he spoke.

"Señor," said he, "when I find one like you, I do not spoil the good God's work in him. You are not the type of man who comes to harm at my hands. A man who can keep his honour as you have done is worthy of life. Had you shot me, or

rather had you attempted to do so—for I bear the charmed life of him who cares not whether he lives or dies—then the story of your death would have been related in the *posadas* of Andalusia for generations. But now, take your life, yes, take it from my hands.

"After to-night we shall see each other no more; but when you look back over your life, señor, you will always remember one man, who, like yourself, was afraid of nothing; a man worthy to stand beside you, Don Q., once of the noblest blood in Spain. A man——" The brigand checked himself in his flood of florid rhapsody and Spanish feeling. "Adios, señor."

Two hours later Gevil-Hay was alone upon the sierras. When he reached Gibraltar, which he did in due course, he was surprised to find himself almost sorry to hear that the Spanish Government, goaded on by ponderous British representations, had determined to cleanse the land of the presence of Don Q.

Since then Gevil-Hay's life has not been a failure. And sometimes in the midst of his work a thought comes back to him of the proud, unscrupulous, gallant brigand, whose respect he had once been lucky enough to win.

CHAPTER III

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH DON LUIS

THE British Government, having been put to some trouble in the matter of Gevil-Hay, immediately and imperiously demanded that the brigand who originated the unpleasantness should be forthwith caught and punished. Whereupon the authorities at Madrid sent down a strongly-worded remonstrance to Don Felipe, Governor of the town by the sea, inquiring why Don Q., the brigand in question, had not been plucked from his eyrie and executed long ago.

So it came to pass that Felipe Majada sat in his chair and cursed the British Government by the length and breadth and to the depth and height of the Spanish language, while Don Luis del Monte, handsome, reckless, and wearing his shabby clothes with an air, laughed to hear him. April was verging into May, and the weather was irritatingly warm, and to call down maledictions in any profusion requires some amount of energy.

"Let them send an army corps to do it, then; nothing else will avail," groaned the Governor Don Felipe, rubbing his scalp, with its brush of upstanding black hair, despairingly. But since he could not indent upon the Ministry for quite so large an order, he cursed the British afresh, because they make such a noise about any individual of their nation who may happen to stray into trouble, although it is clear that the world could make shift

to work comfortably round with a tenth of that troublesome race.

Pah! Were they children that they should be coddled and petted more than others? It made one ill. Had he, Don Felipe, then, done anything that he should be twitted with laxity and weakness? For more years than he cared to remember the local administration had lived on what might be described as fraternal terms with the great *sequestrador*. Live and let live had been their soothing maxim, except on occasion when a company of that staunch little corps, the *guardias civiles,* had been sent up into the mountains to secure the brigand alive if they could, and to shoot him down if they could not.

And this, it must be admitted, they had tried to do to the best of their ability, but if any single member of this company had ever laid eyes upon Don Q., at any rate he had never returned to tell the story. Those who were left would come back in the fulness of time to the white town, that looks across the bay towards Gib, with nothing to show but a tale of the dead who had fallen in the lonely gorges where the cliff cuts black and bare into the hot blue above.

Thus Don Felipe Majada cursed the British, who could not, like other rational peoples, be satisfied with promises. Thrown upon his own resources and realizing that something must be done, which it seemed the ordinary agencies of the law could not effect, he fell back upon the device of employing private enterprise.

It was upon this business that he journeyed to Malaga to meet a certain Don Luis del Monte, who appeared to him extraordinarily qualified for the task to be performed. In Spain, as in other coun-

tries there is always a sufficiency of broken gentlemen, ready to lend a hand to any well-paid job. Luis del Monte was one of these. An unlovely colonial career loomed dark behind him, for after the manner of Spanish officials he had prospered exceedingly in Cuba and come home rich. Returned to the old haunts of his youth he lost all on the turn of a card, and at the time Don Felipe summoned him, he was living in aching poverty above a shop where they sold tobacco and stamps.

The evening was falling, and all the mingled odours of Malaga rose on the air, but if they reached the balcony where Don Felipe sat and swore his seasoned nose took no heed of them.

"No, I will not curse these British,"—and the handsome adventurer laughed in the window opening—"since it is to their pig-headedness I am indebted for—what you are about to give me."

Don Felipe snarled with the puffy effort of a fat man.

"You have met with losses, my dear Luis," he said offensively.

"Why, so I have," replied the other, shrugging his shoulders. "To lose is one mark of a gentleman."

Don Luis was a beggar, and a beggar has no right to own a biting tongue. The Governor entered into the business with a new zest. To pit Don Luis against Don Q. meant bloodshed, and in fat Felipe Majada the instinct of the bull-ring awakened.

"Sit down," he said aloud; "I will explain the plan I have formed."

Then he told the story of Gevil-Hay's detention by the brigands, with the matter of the ransom, and added many other details given by former captives

until del Monte felt he was in possession of all the needful facts of the case. Between them stood wine and cigarettes—the short, brown Spanish cigarettes rolled in sweetened paper and not innocent of saltpetre. Don Luis smoked one after another as he listened, gazing out with absent eyes over the two harbours of Malaga.

When Majada ceased he began.

"I have heard much of Don Q. He appears to be a fine sort of fellow who has made the best use of his opportunities up yonder. I had thoughts of going into the business myself. Meanwhile, what do you want me to do?"

A Spaniard has few scruples outside the region of his pride. The Governor of the little white town put his wish plainly if largely.

"We must rid ourselves of this vulture," he said.

"So?"

"It will be worth your while," added Majada.

"That is as it may be. The risk is great."

"True. But one does not pay for nothing!"

"What do you propose to pay the man who undertakes it?"

"One thousand pesetas."

Don Luis del Monte laughed and snapped his fingers in contempt. Then he leant over the balcony. A girl passing along, under whose black gown a pretty ankle in a striped open-work stocking could be seen, glanced up and laughed back at him.

"By the saints! The prettiest wench in Malaga!" he exclaimed.

"What are you here for?" asked the Governor sourly, "for business or to look at a woman's eyes?"

"Both," said the other easily. "I occupy myself

now with the girl because you have just ceased to talk business."

"Two thousand pesetas then."

Don Luis shook his head.

"Dollars," he said parenthetically.

"Impossible! Would you ruin the country?"

"No, no. You forget I know better, my dear señor. I have already in my time explored her pockets myself! Two thousand dollars."

The question was not settled in a moment, but eventually Don Luis del Monte's debonair inflexibility on the point prevailed.

"The price of my life," he said, "and a beggarly bad bargain."

"For the Government," amended Don Felipe. "Besides you will live to enjoy it in Malaga. How, then, do you propose to get to work?"

"I must be captured, and you will arrange the ransom. They say down here that the brigand recognizes a gentleman and treats him handsomely pending the arrival of his ransom and the arrangement of his affairs. If he does not—well, I am an old soldier. Meanwhile I shall have five days in his company."

"By St. Peter! Cold steel and close quarters!" cried Don Felipe, with rising excitement. "Señor, you are not a coward."

"Nor a fool," rejoined the other coldly.

"Then you have some other design—yes?"

"Certainly I have a design less blaring than yours. I shall start in the early morning."

"Stay! How will you deal with him?"

"As the goatherd and the farmer deal with the other *quebranta-huesos*. I will poison him. He shall share the death of the vultures and the wolves.

I shall have five full whole days with him, I tell you. How can he escape me?"

"I do not know," Don Felipe said dubiously as he watched the thin, sinister face opposite him with a smug interest. "But I have heard him called a bad enemy."

"And I will conquer him by being a bad friend, which is just twice as formidable."

"Yet," and Don Felipe lowered his voice instinctively, "he has other friends. I came hither to Malaga, for if I had had this conversation with you in my own house across the bay, some ear would have heard and some foot have been ready to carry the matter up yonder."

Don Luis made no answer. He put a handful of the Governor's cigarettes in his pocket and prepared to go.

"I must have money to-night—money to repair my toilet, to buy a horse and lay the affair in train. It is necessary to be generous, señor. This may be my last night of pleasure, and then, perhaps"—he began the song with which children mimic the clerk's chant at funerals—"the *gorigor* comes next. Who knows?"

Don Luis del Monte swaggered gracefully down the dim stone passage, with its high barred windows, and so out into the street. As he went along, a woman passed him with a soft southern laugh. For the rest of the evening she evinced a quite inadequate interest in his movements.

* * * * * *

By the early dawn, before the light broke, a man from the sierra waited in the prosaic shadow of Malaga railway station, where presently a woman with her head and shoulders wrapped up against the chill

of dawn, came to him—the woman whose cadences of laughter Don Luis had heard for the first time as he bowed to her in the tortuous, ill-smelling Malaga street on the previous evening.

Robledo was her lover, who had come down from the sierra to see her with a price upon his head and the light of adventure in his eyes. Isabella liked him for his good looks, though he already was careworn, after the manner of mountaineers; but, for his reckless courage, her heart loved him.

Any account of their conversation would be superfluous. Robledo went away in the earliest train that left the city, thus it came to pass when Don Luis del Monte arrived by a round-about route at the foothills, the news of his coming and his errand had already been thoroughly handled in the remote glen where Don Q. lived in his solitary greatness like the vulture whose name he bore.

Robledo had made extraordinary haste to carry to his chief intelligence of the danger that threatened, for rumours of Don Felipe Majada's instructions from Madrid and his anger thereat, with his perplexity as to how they should be carried out, had afforded the last week's talk in the mountain gorge.

Evening was once more drawing on when Robledo sprang up the narrow winding path to the mouth of the cave in the rock-face, where Don Q. chose to house himself apart from his followers. The young fellow, although he was aware that he carried information of the first importance, felt diffident enough as he stood before his high-shouldered, fragile-looking chief. Don Q. possessed in the highest degree the faculty for ruling.

The chief sat moodily in the cave with his concentrated livid-lidded glare upon the young robber.

And, although Robledo was a brave man, he crossed himself furtively.

Then the chief put a question or two, and Robledo told his story at full length. He had followed the Governor to Malaga, after that so much was known, so much was guessed, but the plot was fairly understood and hung well together. For Don Luis had told nothing, he was far too experienced for that, but something had been overheard, and a good deal inferred from the purchases he had made, and, in fact, Robledo had proved himself a very creditable detective. As he grew more excited with his story, he gave way to those picturesque exclamations and gestures which the Andalusian loves. And Don Q. listened, laughing here and there tenderly as a man laughs who sees a subtle and hidden humour. When the tale was finished and the last low laugh had died away, the chief fell into thought; when he looked up he asked—

"And what is your counsel, Robledo?"

But Robledo knew his master too well.

"My lord orders," he answered glibly. "There is no knowledge nor will in the sierra but my lord's."

Don Q. closed his delicate claw-like hand.

"That is well, Robledo my child, for if there were it would die."

Robledo crossed himself again suddenly and involuntarily, and the chief caught the motion.

"And why that, Robledo?" said he.

"I was thinking of the soul of this Don Luis del Monte," replied Robledo with ready untruthfulness.

"Ah, then bring Gaspár and Andrés."

In a very few moments the three men stood in a silent line before him.

"Robledo," he said, "you will go down beyond

the valley of the cork-trees, and wait on the southern track to Ronda. Take men with you, for it may be that Don Luis will come by that way. And you will deal gently with him. You, Andrés, will go towards the passes, for it also is a traveller's path through the sierra. You will bring this *cabellero* to me very safely. And listen, Robledo."

"Yes, lord."

"We share a secret between us and——"

"Yes, lord."

"When it ceases to be a secret you will cease to be a man. Now go!"

The two men turned away from the terrace, and Don Q. followed the lean, sinewy figures till their scarlet *fajas* disappeared down the slope; then, seeming to forget the presence of the third, his head drooped upon his breast, and he remained still and mute like some big sleeping bird for half-an-hour. Meantime Gaspár stood and waited without moving hand or foot.

"And for you, Gaspár," said Don Q. abruptly, but in the same tone as if he had just ceased speaking; "and for you, Gaspár, a peaceful errand—to the shrine of San Pedro. You will see the Fathers."

"Yes, lord."

"Take with you this bag of pesetas and ask them to say masses, beginning next Friday, for——"

Don Q. paused; Gaspár stood in the same patient uneager attitude.

"The soul of Don Luis del Monte."

CHAPTER IV

HOW DON Q. DEALT WITH DON LUIS

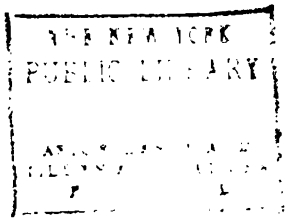
MEANWHILE Don Luis rode on unknowing. On the second morning he had left the open stretches of heath and palmetto behind him, and was mounting the lower spurs of the sierra, where in the hot air, the hood-winged vultures soared about him.

A strange, forgotten land this, with little broken shrines hid in the shuddering woods, and forsaken mule-tracks winding ever deeper into the gloomy gorges. Don Luis rode at his leisure beneath the languorous forests, camping at night in open places and inviting capture by the long column of wood-smoke that drifted up towards the sky. He had no guide, but Don Q.'s net swept a wide circle about the *Boca de Lobo,* and capture was equally probable anywhere upon the sierra. In the lining of his hat del Monte had secured the means whereby he hoped to take Don Q.'s life. Beyond that one resolution his plans were in the clouds, but he relied, as he had had reason to do in many other crises of his career, on chance, treachery, and a good wit.

At length he entered upon a wide valley of cork-woods and ilex-trees, where he rested during the heat of the day, and as the cooler airs of evening blew over the ridges from the sea, he mounted again, and pushed upwards. The first dew was beginning to fall when he halted under a white, out-lying, limestone crag to look round.

On every side, range beyond range, the sierra rose grey, stony, and sinister. The utter loneliness of

Don Luis was hauled up the face of the cliff.


NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

the scene, the fact that he was bound on a desperate errand, that there was no help possible against the bloodthirsty men into whose power he was about to give himself, might well have made him pause, but del Monte's single thought at that moment was success, and the supply of money it promised him for another fling at the tables.

A stone rolled down the perpendicular face of the crag and fell at the horse's feet, but Don Luis was lighting a cigarette and seemed too busy to look up. Then a shot whizzed past his head, ripping a shred of felt from his broad-brimmed hat, but he finished with his cigarette, threw away the match, and was about to raise his eyes, when a loop of rope fell sharply over him and he was jerked from his saddle upwards.

Perhaps Robledo held a twinge of ill-feeling in the back of his mind against the handsome *cabellero* who had bowed so deeply to the girl in the streets of Malaga. However that may be, the indignity of his position as he was hauled up the face of the cliff amidst the jeers of the bandits, roused del Monte, who passed a bad quarter of an hour dangling furious at the rope's end until exhaustion compelled him to allow himself to be secured without resistance.

Nearly all that night the men drove him stumbling wearily through the higher mountain-tracks. Robledo dared not indulge in any overt acts to the hurt of his prisoner, but he comforted himself with dreams of the vengeance of Don Q.

At the end of his journey Don Luis was blindfolded, and led by winding turns and through the chill of an underground passage into the enclosed glen where the brigand chief waited for his coming.

While Robledo went up into the cave to make his report, del Monte was left with a couple of sullen guards in the valley. One happened to be Gaspár, whose errand to the Fathers had been happily concluded.

"My friend," began Don Luis presently, "is this captain of yours all one hears of him down there in the plains? Is it true that he buries his prisoners alive?"

"When he does not crucify them!" replied Gaspár shortly. "It is often too great a labour to dig holes in our rocks."

"And you? Do not some of you taste death slowly—in a like manner?" asked Don Luis insolently.

"It has been heard of," was the imperturbable reply.

"And you love him better afterwards?"

"In the mountains love and fear are one," said the robber.

At length Robledo led the captive into the presence of Don Q. The cave struck warm yet the chief was muffled in his cloak, but he bared his head in greeting as del Monte entered. The two men stood face to face and surveyed each other silently, before Don Q. spoke.

"Your mother, señor, was of the family of the De Casselos?" he asked with entire courtesy.

The strangeness of the question startled Don Luis as much as the appearance of the man who put it.

"I did not think you would be likely to interest yourself in these matters," he replied haughtily.

"And why not?" returned Don Q. with extreme softness.

Yet Don Luis only by an extreme effort kept up the manner in which he had begun the conversation.

"A gentleman of your profession——" he began.

"A gentleman is still a gentleman—in my profession. Answer my question, señor, if you please."

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"You knew her then, señor, that you ask me this?"

Don Q.'s thickened eyelids quivered; he raised his head with a fine gesture.

"That pleasure was mine. I knew her very well," he answered simply. "You have her eyes, beautiful exceedingly; but you cannot look another in the face any more than she could. It was a very little defect——"

"Of nature?" put in del Monte, half laughing as the other hesitated.

"I was about to say of the heart. But these things belong to the past, and only concern us to-day in that they prove you to be of gentle blood on both sides."

"I cannot perceive the advantage to me just now."

Don Q. continued gravely.

"Because I may on that account offer you my hospitality," he said, "in return for your parole. It is thus when one deals with equals. Last year I was deceived into offering hospitality to a merchant who sold dried fruits and flour. I assure you the man's manner of breathing offended me so much that I had to rid myself of him before the arrival of his ransom. You will therefore comprehend my reasons for troubling you. And if you will now give me your parole we may have a pleasant time pending the arrangement of your affairs."

"I give it," answered del Monte, with a very present thought that death would soon free him from his word; "I foresee that I shall enjoy my visit to the sierra, señor, although I hope you will not be very severe in the matter of a ransom."

"It is unfortunately one of the exigencies of my position that I have my children to maintain!" Don Q. indicated the figures of Robledo and Gaspár in the aperture of the cave. "We must have our demands paid in full or——"

"Or?" repeated Don Luis.

"No, no," said the brigand, with a sympathetic geniality; "we will not spoil our first meeting with dismal considerations. I can recommend these cigarettes; you will find them passable."

"I must congratulate you on the discipline of your com—your men," Don Luis said, fingering a cigarette thoughtfully.

"Many others have complimented me also upon that; I assure you, señor, it always gratifies me."

But it must be owned that Don Luis del Monte, from the moment he was brought into the presence of Don Q., began to like his errand less. There was a suggestion in the appearance of the fragile, pale, bald man that upset him. Not that he shrank at all from his own treachery, but it was borne in on him that the brigand was not the easiest sort of man to kill, and the consequences of failure would not bear consideration. Nevertheless, he neglected no point that might assist him in his design; he observed, he bridled his natural insolence, he went cautiously. He quite understood that he was dealing with one who would strike before he spoke.

On a single occasion only he forgot his self-

control for a moment. They were talking of former days, and Don Q. had been relating stories with reserve indeed, but also with force and a fine power of detail.

He told of an incident of the bull-ring in some town to which he gave no name.

"Ah, you have seen it a hundred times, señor!" he was saying. "And in the hot sunshine, to the blare of the trumpets and the bravas of the garish crowd, I passed to the president's chair——"

"You?" asked Don Luis with a quick impatient incredulity.

"Certainly," answered Don Q. "And why not?"

"They draw the line high where the presidents are concerned," replied the other, braving out his first exclamation.

The sweat stood out in sudden beads upon the robber's pallid forehead.

"Let me assure you, señor, that no line could be drawn too high to exclude, not Don Q. in those days, but——"

"Can you not trust me with that most interesting name, señor?" asked del Monte, his sneer obscured by a smile.

"Do you wish to know the name I bore before I covered it with the title by which I am called to-day?" Don Q. looked at him with a significance his words did not contain.

"Yes, by your favour."

The brigand laughed very softly, but with an intensity of amusement that sent a chill of misgiving down del Monte's spine.

"But yes, señor,—since we are friends," added he, almost nervously.

"True, I had forgotten that. I can promise you shall know—some day."

The promise, however, failed to convey any distinct impression of pleasure to the Governor's emissary.

At length the ransom arrived. Don Luis had by this time conceived his plot in detail. As soon as his captor actually held the ransom in possession the assassin determined to make away with him. Once rid of Don Q., he believed himself equal to dealing with the remainder of the band.

The fiery, irritable chief was openly contemptuous of his followers. He lived apart; all power, all authority was concentrated within himself; he confided in none, he took counsel of none, and amongst the gang, as amongst every other collection of men, were various ambitious spirits, of whom del Monte felt he should know how to make good use as soon as the living fear of Don Q. was removed.

He had handled similar material before, and, with the ransom in his hand and a faculty for making promises, he was ready to face the situation when it presented itself.

But, although he was watchful throughout the day, no opportunity occurred for using the poison. Don Q., even in his most morose and absorbed moments, always showed the unsleeping vigilance of a wild bird. The blinking gaze always opened upon del Monte if he stirred, and, though time after time his hand fell upon the phial of poison in his pocket, he never found the few minutes' grace to do the deed.

By night this failure began to work upon his nerves. Without, only the cold scent of the

wind, and the red-cored fires that burned below in the darkness of the glen; within, that terrible companion, whose bleared eyes never seemed to close.

But at length the chance came of itself when a robber, hoarse and diffident, appeared in the mouth of the cave, and Don Q. went out with him, leaving del Monte alone.

With a rapid movement he unstoppered the bottle and poured its contents liberally into the brigand's wine. Then he sank back with a great sigh. The tension was broken; Don Q. was practically dead.

A chill wind, bearing the smell of rain, whistled sadly about the cave, the air was full of reverberations of the mountains, long ponderous tumults backed by a slow silence. The dark green plants that stood on the table shivered. For six minutes that appeared sixty Don Luis sat alone.

Presently Don Q. came back and resumed his seat opposite.

"Señor," he said, "in the old days it used to be the custom here in the sierra for guest and host to exchange glasses. Let us follow the custom and do so now."

He filled his glass with the poisoned wine and passed it over to Don Luis, who accepted it with a bow. Then, Don Luis, pouring out half the wine into his own glass, handed that in exchange to Don Q.

"We will drink to our friendship and mutual prosperity, señor," said he, using the words heartily.

"To the first drinker be the best wish," quoted Don Q. with much urbanity. "Drink, then, my friend; I do not grudge you a better fortune, alas, than mine."

"But, no, señor," declared Don Luis gallantly; "then I must urge that your need is greater than mine. Drink, and may all befall as one would desire!"

How long this pretended struggle of generosity might have been maintained it is impossible to tell had not the chief brought the scene to an end. He would take no refusal, while the other desperately declined.

"Why do you not drink?" cried the brigand; "I do not poison my guests!"

But a saving thought had by this time come to Don Luis's help.

"They call this the parting cup, señor," he replied; "therefore I will not drink it with you. You are alone here; you need a gentleman whom you can trust. If you want a lieutenant, why, you see before you a man who has dealt with the difficulties of life and whose courage needs no testing. I have a liking for you, señor; let me keep you company up here in the sierra!"

Don Q. seemed to pause for consideration.

"Then it shall be as you say," he said at last; "you shall keep me company up here in the sierra—eternal company! I may follow five years hence or to-morrow, but you—go to-night!"

Don Q. was more courteous, more soft-spoken than ever; and del Monte stared at him. Then he cleared his throat, for something rose in it that choked him.

"I do not think I quite take your meaning," he said.

"It is plain, nevertheless, Luis del Monte. What passed between you and that gross fool Felipe Majada on the balcony at Malaga? What errand

brought you into the mountains but that which is held together by a few drops of poison at the one end and two thousand dollars at the other? I know it all! And if I have sinned against Heaven my punishment has come to me now—that the hand of your mother's son should be raised to seek my life."

"Señor, hear me!"

But rough fingers were clapped upon his mouth and in a moment he was pinioned at the door of the cave.

The glen was painted in upon the darkness. The picturesque *ladrones,* yellow handkerchiefs tied across their brows, were playing cards beside the fires. Behind them rose the rocky walls of the valley.

When Don Q. spoke again he delivered sentence in cold tones.

"I was at some trouble," he said, "to allow you time enough to poison my wine. You did so. And now it still wants five minutes to midnight, and at seven and nine in the morning two things are going to happen. They both concern you intimately. Can you guess? At nine the priests of San Pedro, the little church you passed on your way here, will begin to sing masses for a soul. Yours, Don Luis! At seven you will begin to die. If you have not completed the operation by nine o'clock, why, you will, of course, lose some of the good the kind Fathers are trying to do for you!"

CHAPTER V

HOW DON Q.'S SWORD WAS DRAWN FOR THE QUEEN

AFTER the death of Don Luis del Monte, no event of great import occurred for a long period in the sierra. Certain captures were indeed made and certain persons of small consequence were held to ransom during those weary months of monotony, for in the course of his long and interesting career as a chief of *sequestradores,* brigands who hold to ransom, Don Q. had had dealings with many sorts and conditions of men. Persons of divers callings had passed through his hands—sportsmen, politicians, merchants, a doctor, a couple of English M.P.'s, a high-church parson of the same nationality, the German Count von Squeelalotte, an American newspaper proprietor, and many adventurers. But when his men, patrolling the lower passes, lassoed Garth Lalor, they added to Don Q.'s list a gentleman of a profession with which he had never before come in contact.

Garth Lalor was nearer twenty than he cared to own, full of the irrepressible sap of youth, and of a racial blend that made it difficult for him to take things seriously.

It was nearing the end of February when he was captured, and the winter, which was just working itself out in a succession of storms, had been about the worst on record. Even down in hill-sheltered Malaga, its severity had been felt, and up in the *Boca de Lobo,* where Don Q. passed the greater part of it, the winds were roaring off the snows of

the Sierra Nevada, tearing the branches from the pine-trees, and causing the brigands to regret a vocation which forced them to remain in these bleak altitudes, beyond the reach of the short arm of the Spanish law.

The business of a brigand naturally flourishes best in an open season, which encourages travelling. But this winter not a single capture since November stood to the credit of the band. It therefore warmed the chief's chilly blood to hear that the saints had vouchsafed them a captive once again.

In the raw morning darkness, Lalor, blindfolded, was led in the clutches of brown grimy hands through scrub and between echoing rocky passages into the *Boca de Lobo,* where his eyes were released, and a blaze of torches showed him groups of men, picturesque and dirty as his captors, cooking an early meal around windy fires in the open.

Without much delay Don Q. sent for him. Lalor was distinctly stirred by the romance of the situation, for the brigand was a man with an ominous record, and the captive looked with a good deal of curiosity at the fragile figure muffled in a cloak, that crouched beside the great fire, spreading bloodless hands to the blaze. Was this person the fierce-hearted and terrible character they spoke of in the plains? As usual a wide soft brim of felt hid his features, and he seemed unaware of the entrance of the party, until Lalor stepped suddenly up beside him to the fireside.

"Good-morning, señor. It is precious cold," he said.

His two guards sprang forward at the word and thrust him back roughly. Don Q. raised his head and looked full at this unusual prisoner.

"Excuse my taking off my hat, señor," the chief spoke at last in smooth, derisive tones, "but, as you say, it is cold. I regret that your visit to us should be made in such unpleasant weather. Still we welcome you, for we have been in danger of suffering from dulness lately, and I foresee both pleasure and profit from your society."

Garth Lalor was a very adaptable young man. "That's all right," he said good-humouredly.

At a sign from Don Q. the guards retired to the door of the cave.

"Pray be seated, señor," he went on. "I perceive that you are English. One forgives much to the English."

Lalor stared. The superabundant courtesies of Spain had passed unheeded over his head and left him his old casual self. Still, some apology appeared to be looked for.

"Sorry," he said, "if I've done anything wrong."

Don Q.'s face cleared.

"I feel quite sure we shall enjoy each other's society while you remain with me," he remarked urbanely. "Let us at once get over the disagreeables of business, and then, when we understand the position, we can dismiss all sordid considerations from our minds—for the present. But first I must ask you to reply to a few questions."

Lalor nodded.

"Quite at your service, señor. I hope I'll turn out satisfactory."

The chief looked him over. Garth Lalor was a strong-built, clean-limbed young fellow, rather over the middle height, with marked features and sleepy grey eyes.

"I trust so," replied Don Q., with some emphasis.

"Señor, you puzzle me. To what profession do you belong? You have the fingers of a man of practical mind and the eyes of a dreamer."

Lalor smiled. The old pleasant smile was by no means lost on the chief.

"Well, if I had to sign a census paper, I should write myself novelist, or anyhow, author."

To his surprise Don Q. showed symptoms of pleased excitement.

"How interesting! I have never before in the course of my career had the good fortune to meet one of your calling. But of that later. We must, perforce, deal first with the little matter of your ransom."

"Ransom?" ejaculated Garth Lalor, and he broke into a cheerless fit of laughter. Don Q. looked at him in surprise.

"You are amused, señor. May I be permitted to share your amusement?"

"By all means, such as it," said the lad. "You spoke of hoping for a ransom. The idea tickled me —that is all."

The brigand's livid eyelids flickered ominously.

"I still fail to see the point of the joke," he remarked.

"All my possessions are before you. The clothes I stand up in, five pounds in English money, and half a pocketful of the coin of the country, of which the delicacy of your followers permitted them to relieve me," replied Lalor, unable for the life of him to avoid imitating the chief's elaborate manner of speech.

The brigand waved his emaciated yellow hand airily.

"Your relations—they must cherish you! I can

well understand it! Then there is your Government, rich as a dream, and pitiful. I have heard of a public subscription—for a popular author thousands could be raised. Is it not so?"

"I dare say it is." Lalor's lips took an ironical curve. "But, you see, unluckily I am not a popular author, only an unknown one—yet. Ingham, the Consul, warned me before I started. They have had some experience of ransoms before. Anyhow, Ingham told me plainly they were tired of paying them, and that I must take my chance. As for relations, I haven't one in the world who would give sixpence for me! And now you know how we stand."

"But this is terribly sad," exclaimed Don Q. softly. "I hope you have misjudged your relations and friends?" But Lalor shook his head. "It is, alas! nearly always so. I rarely take a fancy to one of our captives, but whenever I do so, it almost inevitably turns out to be one who fails with his ransom. I assure you, señor, this fact forms one of the severest trials of my lot."

Lalor found nothing to say. Sympathy seemed beside the question.

"On the other hand, it was only last summer that we caught a most objectionable person, the German Count von Squeelalotte. I assessed a ransom of heavy amount upon him, and I admit I was rather in hopes that his friends would decline to raise so much to regain him."

"But they did?"

"At once. There is no accounting for tastes!" said Don Q. mournfully; "they left me no option but to release him."

"I'm sorry, señor, but I'm afraid you won't make your fortune out of me."

Don Q.'s face, peaked and sunken like that of the bird he resembled, was inclined courteously towards his prisoner.

"I will do all I can for you, Señor Lalor," he said, after a short pause. "I will name but a little ransom, only two thousand dollars. I trust this can be raised—for your sake?"

Garth shook his head. "You won't get it. I'm not worth anything to anybody except myself. What are you going to do with me?"

"Alternatives are usually deplorable, but we will wait for fifteen days until you have an answer from your Consul," said the chief.

"But the alternative?"

Don Q. sighed. "Alas, señor, you are so young to die."

Lalor was conscious of feeling very young, and very human. The strong life in his veins chilled for the moment, but when he spoke his voice was as casual as before.

"What good will my death be to you?"

"My dear señor"—there was regret in the soft sibilant tones that made the lad shudder involuntarily—"it is business. I have a terrible reputation to maintain. You must be aware of the enormous value of such a reputation to one of my profession."

"I see your point of view," Lalor said judicially; then he laughed again.

Don Q. regarded him with increasing interest. This young man was certainly of a new type. Lalor read the question in his eyes.

"Do you know," he said, "before I heard the alternative you have so delicately alluded to, I was congratulating myself on having fallen into your hands?"

"Pray proceed, señor."

"You see I could do your character such justice in a magazine! I know an editor who'd have given me a nice sum for an account of this experience." He smiled his quaint smile. "It's a trifle hard after spending a couple of years in collecting rejection forms, that the first really good thing to come in my way should turn out so crookedly."

"You travelled to gather local colour?" inquired Don Q.

"Well, you see,"—Lalor looked oddly shy—"I'm not old. If a fellow hasn't age, he has to get experience. Don't you think so?"

The chief felt his heart quite warm to this ingenuous Britisher.

"I know an author," he began, "who for years has seldom left his own hearthstone, yet his transcriptions of humanity are so original, so vitally true, that the world will be shaken with a new knowledge of itself when he publishes them. He has had opportunities of seeing the soul of man naked——"

Lalor pushed back his chair involuntarily. His imagination had divined the truth.

"It is yourself!" he cried, while the thought flashed through him—what sights had not those livid-lidded eyes looked upon?

"You are right. I have occupied my odd moments in compiling an autobiography. It will not be a dull book, and will tend to set me right in the eyes of those who malign me in the plains."

"They do give you a villainous character down there," admitted Lalor.

"Well, for reasons which I have already mentioned to you, I am sometimes forced to adopt re-

gretable alternatives——" The chief stopped and looked resentfully at the door, where one of his men stood holding a letter.

The daylight had now grown stronger, and Don Q. went to the terrace outside the cave-mouth to read the communication. An odd sound made Lalor look up. The chief stood in the centre of the cave, shaken visibly by some fierce emotion. He had thrown off his hat, and his bald, wrinkled brow had knotted itself into a penthouse, from under which his eyes gleamed furiously. Tearing the letter to shreds, he stamped upon it, grinding his heel into the ground. Then he turned upon Lalor like a blight.

"You have been to Malaga?" he asked abruptly. "Who was the chief guest at your hotel?"

"Let me see," Lalor considered. "A fellow from South America, calling himself Da Costa. He seemed to have any amount of money."

"That is the animal who has permitted himself to insult me. Da Costa!" The chief grinned venomously. "You will know him as the Comte de Dieppe, or as he loves to call himself royally amongst us Spaniards, General Don Basilio."

"What?—the Carlist General?"

"Yes. Here is a man who writes asking me to become a rebel, who offers me a free pardon as the price of my honour! Corpse of a scullion! He would overthrow a dynasty! He forgets that between Queen Christina and her enemies lies the sword of Don Q.!"

"You take the side of the Queen Regent?" asked Lalor in some surprise.

"I remember the Court of Spain as it was. I am proud of the Court of Spain as it is! There are not

many good women in the world, Señor Lalor, you will learn that for yourself some day; let us defend and admire those whom we know. This is a moment when all true subjects of Queen Christina should loosen their knives in their belts. It is a mother defending her fatherless child against the plots of powerful and subtle enemies. Well, I have seventy men at her service!"

"Were it not for my misfortune as regards my lack of ransom, you might have seventy-one," exclaimed Lalor, a little carried away.

The chief looked him over silently, then he began to pace the floor with growing excitement.

He halted in front of Lalor.

"Señor, are you willing to risk your life for the Queen of Spain?"

Lalor's only reply was his expressive smile.

"The Queen is already on her way to Malaga, where she is to make a progress through the streets on the 15th. Don Basilio's presence means that some infamous plot against her is being prepared. You have heard of this man?"

"He's pretty notorious."

"You may take my word for it, señor, he is even worse than the world believes him to be. He owed a grudge to the late King; he is never weary of trying to pay it. What peril threatens the Queen no one knows. The foreigners and scoundrels gathered about him are ignorant of it. Even I have been unable to find it out, but I could soon make myself master of his scheme were it possible for me to reach the man's presence. It is hard to get in touch with him, for he lives surrounded by his adherents. The authorities are slow to move, and can discover nothing. I—I alone could do this

thing! It is at the man himself that I must strike!" The chief paused, and laid a slim yellow forefinger on Labor's sleeve. "Are you willing, señor, to do a great service to the Queen, and thereby to cause me to remit your ransom?"

"I am willing without the remitting of the ransom, señor."

"Corpse of a scullion!" exclaimed Don Q. "I see our way into this man's presence!"

"Our way?"

"Yes, we two—alone!" The chief bent forward and whispered for some time into Lalor's ear, breaking off at intervals to give way to terrible sibilant paroxysms of laughter.

As the young man listened, his face lighted up. Here was adventure undefiled.

"Don Basilio's plot is still in the egg—we must crack the shell a little prematurely," added Don Q. aloud in his usual soft tones. "I foresee that Fate ordains you to hold a hand in a fine game. Should I be forced to kill you later, you will at least have lived to some small purpose."

CHAPTER VI

HOW DON Q.'S SWORD WAS DRAWN FOR THE QUEEN

DON BASILIO was a man of European reputation. His heavy forehead, sarcastic eyes, and intolerant mouth, pouted under a bushy moustache, were well known in that international gallery of portraits which weekly papers publish periodically under such headings as "Rumoured Revolution." His incognito of Da Costa at Malaga was a thin one, and meant rather to give the authorities an excuse for wisely leaving him alone, than to impose on the public.

Don Basilio's past life had been a tempestuous one. He had given the Old World and the New cause to regret that he had ever been born. And the quality which had carried him so far was his infinite capacity for revenging himself upon all who crossed the steep and tortuous paths above which burned the star of his ambition.

For some years past he had chosen to identify himself with the troubles in Spain. He it was who once raised the dangerous little bodyguard of mercenaries, that fought sudden skirmishes and engagements, and was to be the nucleus of an army which never took the field, but for months on end was reported to be upon the point of doing so.

In the hotel at Malaga, Don Basilio was surrounded by the remnant of this bodyguard, for there were loyalists in Spain who hated him, whose faces burned at the mention of his name, and who recognized in him the enemy of their country. He moved

from place to place with his little court, an ill-tempered, intolerant personality, spiced with a sort of bullying humour, which commended him even less to strangers than his brusqueries.

The Carlist General, in writing to Don Q., had taken a high tone, and had promised him a pardon for his "many crimes" if he would place himself and his men at the disposal of the revolutionists. Little did Don Basilio think, as he dashed his sprawling signature at the end of this letter, into what a strange grapple of fate he was drawing himself, or what manner of man he addressed with so much of condescension.

* * * * * *

The bleak evening had fallen and the lights of *La Bien Venida* at Malaga were twinkling out upon the chilling air, when a hooded carriage drove into the courtyard of the hotel. From it Lalor descended and, standing upon the marble step before the lofty main door, carefully assisted an elderly man to get out of the vehicle. This latter was a very fragile and thin personage attired in the severe costume of a bishop of the English Church. Under his great-coat could be seen his apron and puny gaitered legs, but between the white tab at his throat and the curly-brimmed hat a beak of nose and a pair of fierce, livid-lidded eyes peered forth to arrest the attention of any onlooker.

"Come, dear uncle," said Lalor, "we have arrived at the end of our long journey."

The only onlooker, who happpened to be a porter lounging near by, glanced at the Bishop's inadequate calves and smiled. In a second the Bishop was upon him.

"What are you laughing at, imbecile?" he

cried in a sibilant high voice and excellent Spanish. "Be careful, dog, or I will cut the grin from your lips."

So appalling was the intensity with which the attenuated figure attacked him that the porter fell back stammering apologies and denials.

"Allow me to pray you to enter the house," interposed Lalor, who felt the joke was better than even he had hoped for. "This excitement is bad for your health, my dear uncle."

"True, dear nephew, true," piped the thin, soft voice. "I am cold. I wish I had never allowed you to persuade me to come to this abominable country."

At this moment the innkeeper appeared to meet them.

"I am desolated, señores, but my house is full," he began.

"Te, te, te," cried the Bishop irritably, "I am here, and here I stay. Do you know who I am? I am the Reverend Dionysius Bellingham, Lord Bishop of Britain."

The landlord hesitated. English visitors paid well, and were not from the point of view of Don Basilio dangerous, still—

"I have but one room, Excellency."

"So? Put two beds into it. Be quick!"

The landlord turned to Lalor.

"Señor," he said in a low voice, with a glance over his shoulder at the masterful Bishop, "can you not persuade the noble lord to try another hotel? There are many in the city."

Lalor looked gloomily into the man's eyes.

"No power on earth could persuade him!" he replied with tragic conviction.

"Pardon, señor, my coat is black, but it can be pulled off! Also I can borrow a sword!"

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

" Come, come, lead the way! lead the way!" piped the Bishop peremptorily, in spite of his now halting Spanish.

The guest rooms of *La Bien Venida* are built round an inner *patio,* paved in marble, roofed in glass, and decorated with many lofty palms. Into this the Bishop advanced with his mincing step, followed by the reluctant hotel-keeper. The sharp, sibilant tones were sufficiently raised to attract the attention of a tall and stout man who had been smoking a cigarette in one of the adjoining rooms. He came striding out.

" What is this noise about?" he asked angrily of the hotel-keeper. " Who is this? Did I not order you to keep the place clear of your pestilential clients?"

In an instant the Bishop had stepped up in front of him.

"Pardon, señor, my coat is black, but it can be pulled off! Also I can borrow a sword!"

The hotel-keeper stood aghast that any one should thus address the great General Don Basilio. That truculent personage seemed a good deal surprised himself.

" I do not fight with gnats!" he answered rudely. " Get rid of him," he added, turning away.

But the Bishop's active figure was again before him.

" Yet I will not be brushed away," he cried with sibilant imperiousness, " more especially by an animal like you!"

Lalor, who was enjoying himself hugely, felt it was time to interfere.

" I think, my dear uncle," he said, laying his hand on the Bishop's shoulder, " that presently you

will deplore having permitted your prominent virtue of Christian patience to desert you."

"True, true, dear nephew," said the Bishop sadly, pressing his thin finger upon his lips. "Your pardon, good señor," he went on. "My excuse must be that although I have strong hopes of ultimately succeeding, I have not yet entirely mortified the flesh. My fiery temper has ever been a thorn in my side." Then seeing that Don Basilio was about to vent his rage in words, he added—"Forget all I have said—I earnestly trust I have not frightened you!" The churchman's livid eyelids flickered up at Don Basilio's puffy face, and before that gentleman could recover his speech, he was trotting up the stairs, followed by his nephew and the hotel-keeper.

Don Basilio stood still, uncertain how to act. Just then the Bishop's piping tones floated down from above.

"Te, te, te! I will remain! I am ill. And if you refuse me entertainment, I shall be obliged to appeal to the authorities. Send at once for——"

Don Basilio went back to his cigarette.

So it happened that the Lord Bishop of Britain, or the man who masqueraded under that name, planted his camp well within the lines of the enemy: in other words, obtained lodging at the head-quarters of Don Basilio.

The latter worthy for a time did not know what to do. Should he insist on the departure of the peppery English cleric, or would it be wiser to let sleeping dogs lie? After half-an-hour's cogitation, he decided that awkward as was the presence of the two strangers in the hotel, it might be still more awkward to bring himself and his people into prominent notice at the moment. Nothing, in fact, could

be more fatal to his plans, and the English Bishop was manifestly a man not to be browbeaten lightly. Besides, if annoyed, he would be sure to write to his English *Times,* and anything that appeared over the signature of a bishop would attract attention.

So Don Basilio cursed the Bishop in two languages, rated the hotel-keeper, and finally dispatched a little note of apology to the Bishop of Britain, which caused the man who received it to shake it from his fingers with contempt.

"So you see, señor, after all no harm has come of taking my own part," he said to Lalor, "I knew my man. Had I allowed him to rough-ride over me he would, at that moment, have had us turned out of the hotel."

"That is so," admitted the young man. He was profoundly interested in the development of the situation. He had not the remotest notion of Don Q.'s design, for even with him the brigand was secretive. Lalor was, it must be owned, a romantic young man, and here was he watching at close quarters and personally aiding and abetting one of those grotesque exploits which had given the brigand chief his European reputation.

"It will have occurred to you already why I chose to come down into the plains as a Bishop of England? The English are, pardon me, a mad nation. They do as they please; no one is surprised. And then their respectability"—he shrugged his pointed shoulders.

"Respectability is a pretty useful asset," laughed Lalor.

"True. At this moment I have no other, and I find it all-sufficient. As to a bishop, a bishop is of all things created the most crassly respectable. Is it

not so? I trust, my dear nephew, that I support the part to your satisfaction?"

Lalor pictured a certain ponderous uncle in England, who, in truth, happened to be a bishop, and hoped that the doings of his double would never come to his ears. But aloud he expressed an opinion that the stage had lost a remarkable ornament when Don Q. turned his attention to the profession of brigandage.

"Ah, my son," argued the chief gravely, "I followed my vocation. Almost any dullard can shine as a bishop, but for brigandage—it is another matter. Not one man in a generation is really fitted to rise to the highest ranks of a calling requiring so numerous and brilliant a combination of qualities."

Lalor agreed and added his appreciation of the luck that had brought him into contact with the single individual of his own generation.

"Te, te, te," broke in Don Q. in the peevish tone he chose to attribute to the part he was playing. "Now, can you suggest a suitable illness for a bishop? I am about to go to bed for two days."

"Go to bed?"

"Yes, it is an essential part of my plan. And, indeed, happily so. Don Basilio is no doubt meditating whether he should leave the hotel. If I cross his path too often he may do so. That would be a misfortune, and ruin our hopes. But if I give out that I am very ill, he will simply indulge in pious prayers for my death, and thank the saints that my powers of interference have been providentially spoiled. I once had an English captive," he continued thoughtfully, "who developed chicken-pox. Is that a disease adapted to the highest ranks of the princes of the English Church?"

"Gout would be more dignified," suggested Lalor.

"Then gout it shall be. And tell them that I have no faith in the medical profession of this country, and that if a doctor presumes to enter my room I will cut off his ears."

"That would hardly be in keeping with your character," remonstrated the young man; "but if you will allow me I will say that we have telegraphed to the great gout specialist in London, Sir Charles Jenkinson, and that until he comes you will trust to your own knowledge rather than to local talent."

Don Q. looked up from the buckled shoe he was removing. "Excellent," he commented. "I foresee, Señor Lalor, that you will one day become a very great writer indeed."

Lalor carried out his part of the programme, and everything fell out as Don Q. had foreseen. Lalor proved himself a good ally, he not only sent a bogus telegram, but he brought a good deal of information up to the sick room, where a meagre, delicately-limbed figure lay patiently in the blankets.

Once or twice Don Basilio condescended to inquire after the health of the Bishop. Lalor shook his head at the big lowering man, and observed that it was a sad case, for his uncle's pain was such that when a door banged in the hotel, the sweat stood out upon the sufferer's brow, and he was driven to repeat very long devotions to keep his tongue from transgressing.

Don Basilio smiled sourly, and afterwards it was noticeable how many doors banged about the region of Don Q.'s bedroom, a fact which Lalor duly commented on to the invalid.

"Let them bang," replied the chief, as he ar-

ranged the black skull-cap of velvet which he wore apparently as a concession to the peculiar habits of British Church dignitaries. "It may not be long before the door of this world bangs on the heels of our very good friend."

Lalor felt conspiracy in the air, though there was nothing tangible to fix on in either the words or acts of his fellow guests. Meantime Don Basilio's sneering and violent temper seemed to grow worse day by day.

* * * * * *

"The Queen enters Malaga this afternoon," observed Lalor, sitting down on the edge of the pallet he occupied in the Bishop's room. "The royal progress through the streets takes place, as arranged, early to-morrow!"

"Ah, then, we must act," replied Don Q., raising himself from his pillow. "This delay is very wearisome, señor. It has been in my mind to go down to *desayúno,* and pistol Don Basilio where he sat."

Lalor grinned appreciatively. He had no doubt at all as to that temptation visiting his reverend uncle, for the brigand appeared to give little heed to the personal consequences of his actions.

"I'm afraid you would have been disappointed, for Don Basilio always remains in his own room for *desayúno,* though he sometimes joins us at *comida* in the evening."

Don Q. was out of bed in a twinkling, and wrapped in his dressing-gown. He was already bandaging one foot with a towel before he spoke.

"It is mid-day," he said, "a waiter has brought my invalid soup. Every person in the hotel is at this moment engaged in devouring food. The time has come, dear nephew."

"What are you going to do?" asked Lalor.

"First we will concern ourselves with what you are to do," returned the chief serenely. "When you leave me you will descend and partake of *desayúno,* and do not forget, my dear nephew, to give evidence of anxiety at the increasing indisposition of your cherished uncle. I can no longer move—I—but you are gifted with an imagination; I can leave the matter in your hands. Afterwards you will go towards the stables, and there you will find a ragged fellow assisting with the horses. I venture to believe you will recognize a black-eyed scoundrel you have seen before in the sierra. When you catch his eye, be so good as to place your forefinger of the left hand thus upon your chin."

"I understand," said Lalor. The affair was becoming engrossing once more. He waited eagerly for Don Q.'s next words.

"As for me, my dear señor," resumed the chief, "you tell me that Don Basilio has been good enough to inquire about my health. It is very well, for I am now about to pay him a visit to thank him. He will not be afraid of a bishop with the gout, and once I am alone with my good friend I shall arrange everything most charmingly. Come, dear nephew, fasten this bandage that I may be able to use my foot if necessary, and then take me on your back, and we will pay our respects to General Don Basilio, who is in the habit of enjoying his *desayúno* alone in his rooms. Good!".

Don Q. perched himself actively on Lalor's shoulders, and they passed out into the empty passages of the hotel on their way to the quarters of the Carlist leader.

Don Basilio sat alone at his meal, and was in

the act of raising a glass of wine to his lips when Lalor, bearing his strange burden, paused in the doorway.

"That will do, dear nephew," piped the Bishop; "place me in a chair by my good friend Don Basilio, and go at once to your breakfast."

"What does this mean—this unwarrantable intrusion?" shouted Don Basilio.

Don Q. raised his pallid claw-fingered hand in deprecation.

"Not at all, not at all, señor," Lalor heard him say as he closed the door upon the couple; "I have come to thank you for the kind inquiries you have been making after me, and to have a little talk with you."

Lalor, in obedience to orders—no one ever disobeyed Don Q.—went down to *desayúno,* and sat through the meal full of excited anxiety as to what might be passing in that upper room between the burly bull-necked General and his fragile-looking opponent.

But no noise was heard, the routine of the meal went through its courses without interruption, and as soon as he could leave the table without remark, Lalor made his way to the stables, where, sure enough, he at once caught sight of the handsome, laughing face of Robledo, Don Q.'s most trusted follower, who was lounging at a door with a bucket in his hand.

Lalor gave the signal, and receiving an angelic smile of intelligence in return, strolled back to the bedroom of the Bishop. What, he wondered, could have happened during his absence?

Don Q. lay panting in the bed, his ivory face even paler than its wont. Lalor noticed also that

the attenuated figure was trembling, and marvelled once again at the mighty spirit which vitalized and upheld it to such extraordinary issues.

"Hullo, señor, what is the matter? You are ill?" The real concern on the young Englishman's face may have touched the brigand. He smiled faintly.

"No, I am not ill, dear nephew. Pleasurable emotions arising from the interview I have been enjoying and the unusual effort of walking have intensified the action of my heart—no more."

"I hope that brute, Basilio——" began Lalor.

"No, no. On the contrary, I am deeply gratified at the upshot of our little meeting." Don Q. had recovered his breath and was readjusting his skull-cap, which had been cocked in a rakish manner over one ear.

"Can you get at him then?"

"At any moment," the chief assured him, with peculiar urbanity.

"But how, and where? The royal party have arrived, the streets are decorated, and——"

"My dear nephew, if you will trouble yourself to go down upon your knees, and look under my bed, I think you will find our excellent friend there."

"Don Basilio?" exclaimed Lalor.

He noticed that the coverlet of the bed now swept the floor. Stooping, he raised it, to be confronted by the savage glare of Don Basilio's eyes as he lay on his back, gagged and bound. The great bulk of the man, his furious purple visage, his exasperation, and violent temper, gave him, even though helpless, a formidable aspect. It appeared incredible that the slight figure in the bed could have overcome such resistance as Don Basilio was capable of offering.

Lalor raised himself and looked down at Don Q. with a new admiration.

"How in the world did you manage it?"

"In the most simple manner, my son. I gave him the choice of coming quietly with me and submitting to my wishes, or having his brains blown out over his breakfast-table."

"And he came with you?"

"But certainly. He did not even hesitate. I had no time to spare, and told him so."

"But what in the world are you going to do with him? We can't carry him away in our waistcoat pockets!" exclaimed Lalor, entering very much into the spirit of the adventure.

"Let him remain where he is," said Don Q. "To-night when all is quiet, we will have a trial."

"In my country we include a judge and jury in our notion of fair trial." Lalor felt bound to say as much.

"Do not trouble yourself, my dear señor, I will myself undertake the duties of both, and indeed you may believe me that justice shall be done."

The disappearance of Don Basilio made an immense sensation in the hotel, and every corner of it was searched, excepting only the chamber of the poor Bishop, who was suffering so acutely from gout.

When a waiter brought the news to that good-hearted personage, he ordered his bedroom door to be thrown wide open, and with feeble words and gestures urged on the searchers to fresh effort.

Evening drew on without any hint being found to clear up the mystery of Don Basilio's whereabouts. The plotters were in confusion, it even became among them a question of flight to save

themselves, for rumour had it that the Government must have received an inkling of the conspiracy.

After dark the search was abandoned by the Carlists for the time. The hotel assumed its usual quietude as the night deepened.

The chamber of the Bishop was luckily somewhat isolated in consideration of his illness. About two o'clock, Don Q. rose and dressed himself in his ordinary attire, packing his bishop's costume in his valise, while he requested Lalor to be so good as to drag Don Basilio out from under the bed.

It seemed from the appearance of the prisoner that, if unbound, his passion would overpower him. But a few piping words from the chief had their usual effect.

"Take off the gag, my dear nephew," gently commanded Don Q. "I feel sure that the señor will understand that at a word or cry my sword will pierce his throat."

Don Basilio replied by a rumble of terrible curses. Don Q. raised a warning hand.

"Te—te—te, your Excellency, before a churchman, too, of rigid views!" Don Q. resumed for the moment his bishop's voice and manner.

Lalor half expected the Carlist's swollen aspect to explode bodily.

"If you are not Satan, who are you?" Basilio humped his shoulders and looked sideways at Don Q.

"You desire to hear? Then I will tell you my name." The brigand bent to the other's ear and whispered something.

Lalor saw a look of stupefaction and incredulity pass across the purple face.

"It is impossible!" he snarled.

"I am also known to a few intimates as Don Q.," added the chief suavely.

"Don Q.? Why you must have had my message?"

"It brought me here," replied Don Q. "I came to look upon the man who mistook me for a traitor."

"But you are a——"

"*Sequestrador.* True. Of the noblest rank of brigand. But it is now your turn to reply to questions."

And so the trial opened. The whole of it cannot be described here. Don Q. proved himself a past master in cross-examination, and as he supplemented his questions with a revolver, replies were forthcoming. Suffice it to say that in an hour the plot against the throne of Spain was laid bare in all its atrocity. Lalor understood that few men had ever deserved death more absolutely than Don Basilio on his own showing.

"And now, señor, I have heard enough," Don Q. spoke slowly. "I will not kill you like a dog, although you have earned such a death. I will give you a chance of life. I have told you my name. You are the only man living who knows it. Twice before, since I took to the mountains, have I revealed that old name of mine, and in neither case did the hearer live an hour after. Take this pistol, nephew, and unloose his bonds. If he attempts to escape blow out his brains."

Don Q. handed the revolver to Lalor. Then from a corner of the room he brought out two duelling rapiers, and courteously begged Don Basilio to make choice of one.

"We will fight, señor, you for your life, I for my name. Clear a little space in the centre of the room,

my dear nephew. I am about to honour this animal by running him through the body."

The swords crossed, and Lalor had another of his many surprises when he saw how Don Q. handled his weapon. He was as quick as a fencing-master, and his style, though that of a by-gone day, left nothing to be desired. Don Basilio, on the other hand, panted as he fought with a heavy, bullying rattle of steel.

"For the Queen!" cried Don Q. as he pierced his antagonist's arm.

Don Basilio, stung with the pain, made a fierce onslaught, and Don Q., holding his sword straightly, passed it through the fleshy body, which subsided with a horrible leaning movement to the floor.

Don Q. cleaned both rapiers with some care on the sheets, then looking down upon the dead man he said softly—

"Through the heart. That is the end of a very dirty scoundrel!"

Lalor stood silent staring across the corpse at the terrible chief.

"We had better be going," said Don Q., after a musing pause, "but first I would arrange that our friend shall be in a position to greet Her Majesty from my balcony when she passes in the morning. I should desire to be present myself, but I dare say you will agree with me, Señor Lalor, that upon the whole, Don Basilio will very well replace me in testifying to my loyal devotion!"

With a strength of which the young man would not have believed him capable, Don Q. bent down, and raising the body, placed it in a chair. Then, helped by Lalor, he bound it in a sitting posture, and carried the chair into the balcony outside their

window, which overlooked a main street through which the procession was to pass.

A few moments later they had reached the street, and hurried along it. Before turning the corner Lalor stopped to look back. Over the edge of the balcony with its flapping draperies was visible the great blank face of the Carlist, sustained there on his high seat of mockery to do honour to her between whom and himself had lain the sword of Don Q.

Lalor stopped at the door of the carriage which was awaiting the brigand in a narrow old lane.

"How about our bargain now, señor?" he questioned.

Don Q. took his foot from the step, bowed punctiliously to the young fellow and answered—

"You are free, Señor Lalor. Your ransom is remitted for the good service you have rendered to Her Majesty—and to me. I thank you in her name and my own. What do you now desire to do?"

"I cannot return to England—very easily," Lalor said in a dubious tone.

"Not yet, I am afraid, señor."

"And if I remain here I shall be put into prison."

"Then, obviously, you must return with me to the mountains. I have conceived a liking for you, señor, such as is rare with me. Your companionship will be a boon to a lonely man. Besides, I need a lieutenant in my band."

There was nothing for it but to agree to go with Don Q., at least for the present. Lalor thanked the chief, and they drove away together.

CHAPTER VII

THE EARS OF THE GOVERNOR

THE death of Don Basilio under circumstances at once so mysterious and so dramatic, caused no small stir not only in the Peninsula but throughout Europe. The more the matter was noised abroad the more difficult it became for Garth Lalor to leave the mountains. At length, however, Don Q., at last convinced that the young man had no mind to accept the lieutenancy of the band, contrived his escape.

On a windy evening as darkness was closing down over a small fishing village, he got away upon a boat bound for Gibraltar, and looking back at the shore, saw among the shadows a lonely figure on horseback still watching his departure. The horse's tail streamed out on the raw wind, and the rider sat muffled and huddled on his saddle. To Lalor it seemed as if the scene held in it a pathos far beyond mere actualities, for did it not represent in some sort the life of Don Q., a lonely life spent in a stress of storm and gloom?

So the east wind blew and blew, and though the little boat tacked long and wearily, Garth Lalor at length reached Gibraltar. So for the moment the affair ended for the young man. With Don Q. it was far otherwise. Results soon grew out of the duel fought at dead of night at *La Buen Venida,* results quite as extraordinary as the encounter itself.

The first followed closely upon the departure of Lalor, before in fact the east wind ceased to blow.

Now there is a criminal in Spain who never enters the dock, yet who has been directly responsible for many a wild quarrel and stabbing affray. That criminal is this very east wind. The statistical reports show that the frequently fatal brawls of the Peninsula are doubled in number when the *levanté* blows, galling the nerves of the Andalusians.

A week later, Don Q. was nearing (though he himself had yet felt no symptom of the fact), the end of one of those ill-omened fits of depression, which were wont to settle from time to time upon his spirit. Great as his reputation then was, upon that afternoon, when the east wind was moaning and roaring over the rocks about his cave in the hillside, he was upon the brink of a series of events which were destined to cast a new light upon his fantastic character.

Withdrawn in the gloom of his cave, he sat huddled in his cloak over a glimmering fire, his face hidden by his shadowy hat. For days since Lalor left he had brooded thus, hardly moving, like some large, sleepy bird. Sunk in a black depth of despondency, he moped with his eyes half covered by their strange wrinkled lids, and who can guess what dark thoughts and dreams filled his mind at such periods?

The enclosed glade under the cavern was silent also, though round the fires lounged groups of his wild-looking followers, red or yellow handkerchiefs bound about their brows. Surcharged though they were with the nervous irritation produced by the east wind, they stirred and spoke with caution, glancing up apprehensively at the cave, which showed like a dark hole in the cliff above them, and

which somehow seemed to be a listening ear, that no whisper could escape. During times like the present they had learned to be very still. So tremendous a hold had the fierce brigand over his men, that when he appeared among them in one of his black moods they would force tears into their eyes.

"My children," Don Q. had once said, "will respect my silence. They will always respect what they do not understand. The greed of gold, the love of women, the passion for gambling, these things they understand. My silence they do not understand. Therefore let them walk warily. I am king and chief in the mountains, and my will is that when I am sad my children shall be sad also. Let them weep for my sorrows, lest I give them sorrows of their own."

The picturesque groups about the fires speculated as to the cause of the particular brooding-fit, that just now cast its gloom upon them. Some laid it to the credit of the *levanté,* others insisted that it arose on the day that Robledo brought up newspapers from the white town by the sea. Had the Government, by any chance, placed a yet higher price upon their lord's capture? A third party chose to believe it was accounted for by the thefts of El Duques, as he called himself, a "little cat of Madrid," as the saying goes, one of the dregs of the population, who had lately begun to play the footpad on the confines of Don Q.'s territory.

But to none of those causes was the chief's dark humour due. Fear played no part in his twisted, self-torturing thoughts. The ill-doings of El Duques (the duke) had vanished before the storm of wrath evoked by a little paragraph in the paper,

which though insignificant to the ordinary mind, touched him on an old and festering wound.

Here is its history. A new governor had lately been appointed to the prison of Castelleno.

Don Hugo was a roystering blade, handsome, noted for his gallantries, and early successful in his career. In an ill-advised hour he delivered a speech in public, wherein he observed that Don Q. was a happy nickname for the brigand chief, who for so long had terrorized the district. He recounted some of his crimes, and fulminated against him the penalties of the law.

All this Don Q. read in his mountain eyrie with exceeding relish. It flattered his self-esteem. The speech was fully reported in the local journal, which we may call *El Mundo,* but the sting lay waiting in the last clause: "And yet this reputed king of the mountains," concluded Don Hugo, "is, after all, a miserable wretch, poorer than the meanest ass in Spain, for he carries but one ear!"

Whatever his other bodily infirmities, the bandit possessed both his ears, yet the libel was of a nature which could never be forgiven. His diseased vanity dwelt upon it with an ever-growing bitterness. The slumbering devil in him awoke, tormenting him to fury.

Upon this day, which followed an interval of terrified quietness, the robbers' valley was thrilled by an excitement, hot with the double seasoning of novelty and danger. A party scouring the lower hills, according to their practice, had met with a lady—a very great lady she seemed—who, far from objecting after the usual manner to being carried prisoner into the sierra, insistently demanded to be taken into the presence of the dreaded chief.

This was all very well; but, even for a dame of mark, what man among them would dare to disturb his grim hour of melancholy?

Finally, the individual whose misfortune it should be to carry the message to the cave was elected by throwing dice. The lot fell upon Gaspár, a lowering rascal, who sullenly made his way up the winding path on the face of the cliff. He entered the gloomy aperture, and stood waiting with bowed head for the chief's notice.

Don Q. was brooding in a niche beside the fire. Afternoon waned. The wind made descents from the Sierra Nevada and gambolled titanically in the lean firs, passing on downwards to sweep the fields of asphodel which lie about the foothills.

Thus four hours passed. The wind had sunk with the setting of the sun. Night was closing in. Still Gaspár stood, not venturing to move hand or foot.

In the dusk Don Q. lifted up his head. "Do not keep me any longer, I pray, Gaspár," he said in a sharp, sibilant voice. "What is it?"

"Lord, a señora would speak with you," stuttered the man.

Don Q. paused. It must be confessed that a lady desiring an interview with him was something of a novelty.

"Good. The señora's name?"

"The lady would tell you that herself, lord."

"Let her come." Gaspár turned away with relief, but the chief stopped him. "Stay, Gaspár. Make up the fire, and light a torch, fix it up there behind me. I trust, Gaspár, you have not inconvenienced the señora by keeping her waiting? I will ask her, and if——" the silence was eloquent.

A few minutes later a lady swept into the circle of light within the cave. Her face was hidden by a mantilla, but she moved with the air of acknowledged beauty, audacious and graceful.

Don Q. rose from his seat in the gloom beyond the fire and bowed.

"I am the chief of the *sequestradores,* and the señora's very humble servant."

The words uttered in purest Spanish with the soft tone of courtesy almost startled the hearer. She peered across the smoke and flames, but the torch had been set to baffle her vision.

"I have come, señor, to implore your aid," she said impulsively.

At the same instant she flung back her mantilla, and disclosed her features. Don Q. gazed at her for a moment in silence. She was a golden Spaniard; dark-eyed, with a mouth like a red blossom, her somewhat cruel-looking but extreme beauty enhanced by a skin of exquisite fairness, and crowned with golden hair.

"Señora," began the soft voice after a pause, which the lady fully appreciated as a tribute to her charms, "am I permitted to ask by what name I may remember such loveliness?"

"Catalina, the Condessa——" She broke off excitedly; she had an end in view, and wished to gain it without delay. "I was told that you were kind to those in distress, and would help a woman when you could."

"I rejoice that there are still some speakers of the truth under the mountains. Be at ease, Doña Catalina, my pleasure at the sight of so much beauty is only equalled by my impatience to know in what manner I can show my gratitude for the honour of this visit."

"Señor, I am the wife of the handsomest cabellero in Spain, alas!"

"Ah! And the Condessa dwells——"

"In Castelleno," she answered.

"In Castelleno?" The fact was pertinent to the moment. "Be seated, señora. You are doubtless acquainted with the governor of the prison!"

The Condessa started slightly.

"Why, yes."

"Is he not an ugly, pimple-faced fellow?" questioned Don Q.

She replied hotly: "On the contrary, he is an exceedingly handsome man."

He cut her short. "Pardon me, but are you sure? I have heard that ladies cried out at the mere sight of his smile!"

"With gratification, perhaps," she answered, and sighed impatiently.

"No, no, señora; you are surely mistaken."

"Hardly possible, Don Q. He is my husband!"

"You are then the wife of the governor, Don Hugo?" The chief's smooth voice vibrated slightly with some emotion. "I would envy him, if I dared."

"Of what use is beauty if it does not secure love?" she cried petulantly. "My husband——"

"You love him?"

"Not always," with a charming pout.

"At this moment?"

"At this moment I hate him!" She leant forward with a swing of her lithe body, her eyes flashing. "I heard a whisper—I suspected—I set spies—I followed him." She clasped her hands before her breast, then flung them apart with a

vehement gesture of rage. "Oh, at this moment I could kill him!"

"Proceed, I beg of you. What have I to do with lovers' quarrels?"

"Everything, if you will help me! Yes, we quarrelled. He laughed at my tears. I vowed I would throw myself on your protection. He dared me to do so, and, though I was indeed afraid (for your name is a cause for shuddering in the plains, señor), I came. He must pay a ransom for me. Thus shall he be taught to value his wife."

"Nay, señora; I could not have the heart to deprive him of your charming society. Figure to yourself his anxiety!" was the unexpected reply. "You shall be sent down to Castelleno to-morrow in safety."

The beautiful face darkened. "I will not go!" she cried imperiously. "I did not fancy you would side against me with my husband! Remember," with a witching glance at the dim figure in the corner, "you promised to help me."

"I have not forgotten. Yet you must go to-morrow, though your departure will leave the mountains bleak indeed!"

"You are only a man after all!" she exclaimed angrily. "The sins of one man are not sins in the eyes of another man; perhaps you would feel less for him, if you knew more of what he says of you. Only last Sunday he vowed you were a coward."

"Don Hugo takes much upon himself when he says that." A changed note in the low voice frightened her.

"He had an argument to back it," she ran on nervously. "He said that it was easy to terrify a helpless captive up here when you have your men

beside you. But he would wager—oh, I cannot go on, señor!"

The flames of the fire had died down in some degree, or perhaps Don Q. had slightly changed his position. However that may be Doña Catalina began to see the figure opposite to her more distinctly. The muffling cloak took on the shape of heavy bedraggled plumage, the depressed head pushed forward between sharp raised shoulders completed the likeness to a great vulture. And the terror of the dreadful and mysterious Don Q. struck cold into her very soul.

"Favour me by proceeding, señora."

The tone was as gentle as ever, but its sibilance was more apparent. The Condessa shivered and obeyed.

"He wagered that alone, unbacked by your comrades—I mean followers, you would prove yourself —oh, how can I say it?"

She turned her lovely imploring gaze towards that brooding presence.

"But you must, señora. Having gone so far I regret to insist——"

She hesitated; but the brigand chief's name had for too long scared the countryside to fail in its influence under circumstances such as these.

"Have it then," she cried desperately. "You would prove yourself as cowardly as you are hideous."

"Corpse of a scullion!" The ejaculation burst out with violence; then the voice resumed gently— "but even now, lady, you have missed out one little particular."

"No, no," she sobbed, "I recollect no more."

"Then listen. The governor of the prison of

Castelleno was good enough to declare in public that I have but one ear. It is a lie, as I mean to show him. To-morrow you will take a message from me to His Excellency Don Hugo, your husband.

"But," she ventured, "you promised to help me."

"That will I do also. You must have the goodness to tell him that before the new moon I, alone, without a single follower, will come down into Castelleno. I make myself clear?"

"Yes, señor."

"Tell him I have a little museum up here in the mountains, to which I desire to make a small addition."

"Yes, señor." The iterated words were all her dry lips could frame.

"Tell him further that when I come down into Castelleno I shall have with me two ears—my own; but that when I depart I shall have four ears, my own and his. Yes, señora, alone and single-handed within fifteen days, I, Don Q., will come down from the mountains and crop the ears of the Governor of the prison of Castelleno."

"But," she cried in horror, "you have deceived me. An earless husband!—how unendurable!"

"Nay, señora, he will be the more faithful, believe me."

CHAPTER VIII

THE EARS OF THE GOVERNOR

For the eighth time the Governor of the prison of Castelleno muttered an angry oath. Because, for the eighth time that evening, his Excellency had found his hand straying nervously to his ears.

The message of Don Q. had been faithfully brought down to him by his wife. In her presence, and indeed to himself during the hours of daylight, he would scoff at the threat as the absurd and empty vapouring of a wretched hill-thief. He was a strong man, mentally and physically, yet when evening began to fall, and the wind moaned over sad Spain, his impressionable nature took on a more sombre tint. In vain he looked at the high stone walls about him, and called himself a fool of fools; in vain he redoubled the usual precautions of the prison, for always behind his hour-to-hour thoughts crept that unconquerable misgiving. He would start at a footfall, and his hand whisk up to his ears. He cursed his imagination, he cursed Don Q., he cursed his wife, but in his heart of hearts he wished he had let sleeping dogs lie.

His sleep had not been so good of late. In the darkness his mind was haunted by the many stories of the brigand that were rife in Andalusia. He recalled various expeditions, addressed against his foe, that had wound away into the sierra. He recalled the period of waiting, and then the return of the survivors broken with hardship and the terror inspired by the fate of their comrades.

He remembered a hundred tales of the fierce chief, each one of which made him shudder. For Don Q. was a man of a strange, warped sense of humour, and scarcely one of the legends attached to his name but glowed with lurid manifestations of this quality. Besides, the bandit appeared to be omniscient. None ever lived to carry him false news twice. But true information was paid for with terrific lavishness.

Above all, Don Hugo could not forget that the man's promises were always kept; that he never failed to make his acts coincide scrupulously with his threats. There can be no manner of doubt about the fact that the governor's ears tingled when he dwelt upon the thought of the immutably vengeful creature he had so mortally offended.

Yet, although this greyness of spirit pervaded the life of Don Hugo, there seemed to be actually no immediate cause for alarm. Up in the *Boca de Lobo,* the Wolf's Mouth, as the robber's valley was called, all was going on as usual. Don Q. remained in his cave issuing orders and dealing out justice according to his own drastic code. But he was not idle. The task he had set himself was one of enormous magnitude, and any small mistake or slip could only end in supreme disaster. Don Hugo embodied the constituted authority of the State, and he was, moreover, forewarned, and on the alert at every side.

But during that period the human network with which Don Q. swept the countryside for information responded at many points to his manipulation. One well-to-do farmer shut his eyes contentedly, although his most valuable horse disappeared for a while from his pasture; a respected citizen of a

seaside town procured, with some trouble, a special form of saddle and bridle, and so on. Don Q.'s plan was laid out very subtly, and with a minute precision of detail, for his fierce heart dwelt in a frail body, and he proposed to go down single-handed to smite his enemy.

When all was ready, he called up Robledo and Gaspár to the cave.

"My children," he said, in his silkiest tones, "there are two under the mountains with whom it is necessary that I should deal—the thief, El Duques, and the Governor of the prison of Castelleno."

A flicker of excitement lit up the dark eyes of the men, but the chief raised his delicate yellow hand.

"I have nothing yet for you to do save to secure the quiet of my musings. You will bring my food as usual day by day. I lay no command of silence upon you, but for no reason whatever—you heed me, Robledo?—for no reason whatever am I to be called forth until you see me again."

The men touched their tongues and eyes.

"That is well. Keep your oath in mind," advised Don Q. "For the story of what I am about to carry out will be told in the *posadas* of Spain by your children's children."

After this the quiet of death fell upon the cave. The band believed the chief to be still there, for he certainly had not passed by the sentries, who rigorously kept the only known entrance to the valley.

While these events were going forward in the sierra, El Duques was giving full play to his predatory instincts about the foothills.

He was a thief of the meanest sort, drawing his

spoils from those who could least afford to part with them. His victims were the very poor. By lonely bridle paths and sheep-tracks he lurked, robbing women going to and from market. He raided the miserable huts of the charcoal-burners, and the wandering herdsmen knew not what lentisco bush might disclose the villainous face, the sight of which meant ensuing days of hunger, when their scanty victuals had been rifled at the pistol's mouth. It has been recorded that the behaviour of the footpad had long been a source of irritation to that humane gentleman, Don Q.

About the time when the beautiful lady from Castelleno visited the sierra, El Duques put the final pinnacle upon the monument of his sins, when he fell in with a certain Carmelita, the pretty young bride of a peasant, and murdered her for her purse of four pesetas. News of the crime was brought up to the *Boca de Lobo* by the woman's brother, and Don Q. took the matter into his immediate consideration.

Where the mighty bulwarks of the mountains merge gradually into the plain below, many a lonely valley and ravine lie desolate and empty of human existence. Midway in such a glen huddled a clump of firs, among whose green-black crests the wind was hustling. A mule-track led through the ravine, sometimes plunging into the bed of the torrent under the thickets of laurestinus and oleander, sometimes rising to less difficult ground, such as lay around the little, natural terrace on which the fir-wood clung.

Beside the path at this point stood a forsaken *ventorillo,* or wayside wine-shop, a poor place built of rush and reed, half hidden in the shadow of the

trees. The sun was sinking far over the rim of the forlorn landscape; a wedge of birds flew southwards beneath the darkening sky. Save for the ruined, bottle-shaped *choza,* where wayfarers could no longer call for a draught of white wine from the skin, not a sign of habitation broke the circle of sight.

But in the heart of the wood a man wrapped in a cloak, was dismounting, stiff with a long day's travel, from his horse. He saw to the needs of the animal, and taking a small valise from his saddle, hid it in a neighboring thicket. Then he made his way through the trees to the back of the hut, and, having satisfied himself that it was empty, he passed in. A little heap of wood ash and some charred sticks marked the spot where a fire had been kindled. The newcomer stooped and touched the ashes.

"Still warm," he murmured. "Tomás told me truly. He shall have his reward."

Then taking a small lantern from under his cloak he lit it, shut off the light, and sat down in the gloom to wait.

Four days earlier Don Q. had left the *Boca de Lobo* by an entrance known to none but himself. In a lonely gorge he found waiting for him, tied amongst some high scrub, a horse saddled and bridled in semi-military fashion. During those four days, whether riding downwards by devious and little-known paths, or cooking his meal at sunset, or lurking in a thicket to watch the passing of a couple of *guardias civiles,* or dozing the dark hours through rolled in his cloak, the vision always before his eyes took the form of the shapely ears of the Governor of the prison of Castelleno.

As a rule the chief lived withdrawn in his fastness, conceiving and directing the operations of his followers, but seldom taking any active part in them. Now, however, the taunts of Don Hugo called for personal intervention. The occasion, he felt, was worthy of him.

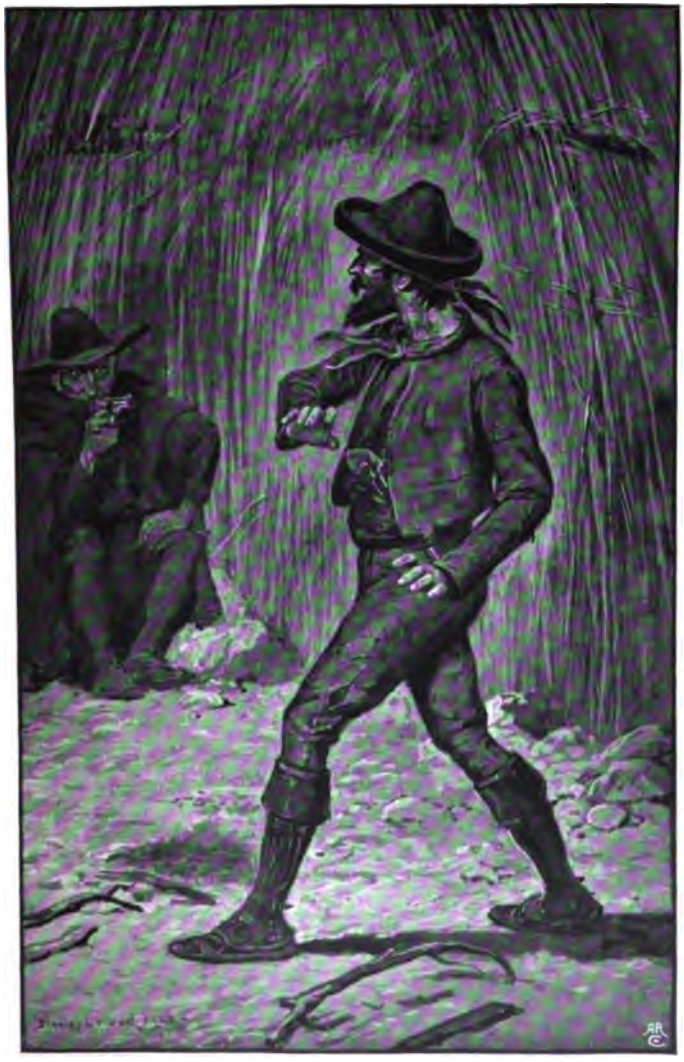
He was engaged upon a fantastic exploit. The difficulty of entering the governor's presence might in itself have seemed insurmountable; but almost as Don Q. uttered the words of the threat a plan formed in his mind, and it was in pursuance of this plan that he sat in the darkening, forsaken hut and tasted already the fierce joys of action.

He brooded and listened. Evening became night, and when the bell-shaped opening which marked the door of the *choza* grew into a faintly luminous picture of the night-sky framing seven stars a quiet footfall told that El Duques was approaching his temporary lair. He walked moodily, for, although he had been fairly lucky in some petty pilferings, he had heard ill news.

He had received a final warning that, as he persisted in his discreditable habits, the King Brigand was about to make an example of him. El Duques spat out some venomous words against the higher power, but promised himself at the same time that to-morrow's sun should find him many miles away.

With an angry grunt he entered the *choza* and bent to search for some dry sticks to rekindle the fire, wholly unaware of that other human presence.

A light suddenly suffused the hut. El Duques started erect; but the oath froze on his lips, for, seated beside the door, was a cloaked figure that bore a frightful resemblance to one of the great carrion birds of the mountains. Moreover, a pistol,



"You are altogether mistaken," replied Don Q. . . . "the remainder of your life will hardly suffice for an interview such as ours!"

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

with a delicate finger hooked on the trigger, showed menacingly.

El Duques tried to pull himself together. "Who are you? What's your business here?" he asked roughly.

"I imagine, my excellent Duques, that you already know who I am; and, perhaps, if my messengers are as sure as I believe them to be, you can also guess my business."

Don Q. was very urbane. The manner deceived his hearer.

"I don't mind listening to you, Don Q., but make it short. A few minutes can settle all that lies between two gentlemen like you and me," said El Duques jauntily.

"You are altogether mistaken," replied Don Q. with a terrible softness; "the remainder of your life will hardly suffice for an interview such as ours. Stop!" At the volcanic, sibilant word, El Duques' hand dropped from his belt. "Bring your weapons and lay them on the ground at my feet."

There was no disobeying the command.

"How do I know," grumbled the thief, "who you are? A cloak and a sombrero, and I could play at being the Quebranta-huesos myself."

The chief pulled off his hat and stretched his face towards the other. The wedged-shaped head, entirely bald and covered with thickened skin; the hooked peak of the nose, and, above all, the heavy-lidded, malevolent stare, seemed to paralyse El Duques. He stood dumb, shaking from head to foot.

"I should much like to see your permission to rob and kill in the foothills. There appears to be

some trifling misunderstanding," went on Don Q. evenly.

"I was poor and starving," began El Duques.

"Therefore you filch from other poor and starving folk. Shame on you! You have brought dishonour and discredit upon a very noble profession. You have degraded a great calling by mean and thievish methods. The poor are sacred, yet you have preyed upon the helpless; you have slain those kindly-hearted ones, who out of their poverty would give food to the stranger in his need. Such are our peasants. But you, off-scouring of a vile city, lost to the sense of mercy——"

"It is said that my lord is not too merciful when his captives fail to find a ransom," whined the other.

"Pray remember, good Duques, I am not a thief, I am a *sequestrador*—one who holds to ransom, a very different thing. I force my living from those who selfishly spend money on themselves, or who as selfishly hoard it. But I came not to argue. I came to remind you that already you have had two warnings of my displeasure at your methods, and to ask you whether you ever heard of the fate of a certain Antonio, who was—as—you—are?"

El Duques shivered again. He remembered well enough the dreadful tale of that other petty thief, who had robbed and ill-treated a poor woman. The brigand of high degree had spared the Civil Guards the trouble of catching him. Sending half-a-dozen of his followers to fetch Antonio to his presence, Don Q. had reproached him with his crime, then blindfolded him and ordered him to hop forward thirteen paces. The thirteenth hop was 1700 feet deep, and those in authority, who found the remains,

were never quite sure what manner of man had perished.

El Duques fell upon his knees.

"I appeal to you, lord of the sierra. I am, in truth, but a petty cutpurse, and unworthy to be named in the same breath with your mighty lordship; but"—the scoundrel in his panic hit upon a fatal plea—"wolf does not devour wolf, highwayman does not rob highwayman, bandit spares bandit."

For answer Don Q. struck him in the face with the hilt of his dagger.

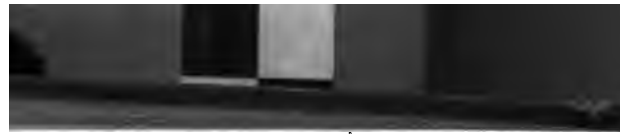
"Corpse of a scullion!" he cried furiously. "You deserve death for this alone! Are we equals that I should spare you? What has a gutter-born thief to do with a *sequestrador?* Would you declare Napoleon a murderer because he won battles? Learn once and for ever the immeasurable gulf that divides you and such as you from Don Q.!"

* * * * * *

It was evening. On the roof of the prison beside a cluster of potted palms a couple of reclining chairs had been placed in the best position to catch the cool airs from the mountains.

In one Doña Catalina yawned and fanned herself languidly, while the governor sat smoking cigarettes in the moody silence that day by day was growing upon him. Now and again he lifted his eyes and gazed across the white town and the tillage surrounding it, to the tracery of peak and pinnacle which beyond them climbed into the pink evening sky. He had manifestly lost flesh, and the frown upon his handsome brows told of ruffled nerves.

He was irritably reflecting that he was a fool to dwell upon the menace of a frail-bodied, deformed,



and probably crippled demon, who, although a source of terror in the distant sierra, would be impotent and harmless enough, even were he able to come face to face (a highly improbable achievement, by the way) with himself—the governor stretched out his legs before him and approvingly felt their muscles.

Yet—Don Hugo relit his cigarette and fell back into his chair—only that very morning he had found the beak of a vulture lying on the table of his private room, and nobody appeared to know how it got there. It might of course mean nothing, but it was the beak of an Egyptian vulture, a neophon, in fact, of the bone-smashing carrion bird known in Spain as the *quebranta-huesos*. Such an incident might have no connection after all with the man, whose shadow lay like a blight across his gay life, but—the hand of the governor, nevertheless, crept unconsciously to his ears.

A sweet low laugh brought him to his feet. He glanced angrily at his wife.

"Again! Oh, my Hugo, you stare at the mountains and finger your ears as if Don Q. could stretch his long talons across from his cave and pull them off!" she laughed again with an abandon of enjoyment that came near to breaking down the restraint Don Hugo had placed upon his temper.

"Not precisely. But I admit that sight of the sierra reminded me of your foolish visit up there, and naturally of that robber's most insolent message," he replied with an air of loftiness. "This has forced me to take special steps with a view to setting an end to his career. A conclave of the principal personages of Castelleno and the neighbourhood is to be held in the great hall presently.

An extraordinary expedition will then be sent up against him. I will probably lead it myself——"

The señora rose from her seat and curtseyed deeply and derisively.

"I shall be doubly anxious about your ears then, my beloved! Don Q. is a man of his word. But, see, your guests begin to arrive."

Spaniards, in spite of their reserve, are moved to excitement upon any subject which touches them nearly. The caballeros of the district no less than the citizens of the town appeared to find in Don Q. a topic far from conducive to calmness. However, his reputation stood with the poor; the rich, whom he sent empty away, bore him much ill-will. The room resounded with tales of the mysterious brigand. Each man could supply a different anecdote of his annoying, if not terrible, exploits, some of which dated back a score of years, some of yesterday, but almost all stamped with that distorted humour which commonly bit too deep for laughter.

The Count de Bermeja had told the story of Antonio's punishment by the brigand, and another of the hidalgos had spoken of a report that Don Q. hoped eventually to publish a book, which should take the form of an autobiography, and be enriched by a couple of appendices, the first setting forth the names of all his captives who had been ransomed, the dates of capture, amount of ransom demanded and received, and date of release; the second appendix, to be set within a suitable border of black, should contain a complete list of those whose money-value had failed to arrive, with a little note below each name detailing in what form death had met them.

Then Don Hugo, rising in his place, referred to

the crowning offence of which the brigand had been guilty. He told, in fact, with certain expedient deviations from historic accuracy, the tale of his wife's journey into the mountains. That so beautiful a woman should have been kidnapped and half frightened to death stirred the ready Spanish chivalry, and when Don Hugo declared himself willing to administer an oath of membership to a Society of Vengeance, the idea was greeted with acclamation, and was about to be carried into effect when a servant disturbed the meeting.

A captain of the Civil Guard was in waiting below, charged to speak without delay to the governor on a matter of the highest importance.

"You will be good enough to request Captain del Pino to rest himself for a few minutes," returned Don Hugo impatiently.

"Pardon, Excellency, he bade me present this." The man held out a card upon which some sentences were written.

The governor glanced at it and uttered an exclamation.

"Señores, Captain del Pino comes from Madrid upon business connected with Don Q."

"We can enroll him in our membership," suggested one of those present. "As he is of the *guardia civile,* he will, without doubt, be a useful addition to our counsels."

A slender man in the uniform of the Civil Guard was already bowing in the doorway. His long blue cloak hung behind his shoulders, and, as he raised his head, covered with dark curling hair, the assembly saw that he bore stains, not only of travel, but of misadventure by the way. His brow was

bandaged, and a spatter of blood showed on his cheek.

"My business is pressing, Excellency. Can I see you alone?" he said, in a low tone, which, however, carried an imperious echo.

"You have a mission connected with——" began the governor pleasantly.

"Pardon me," interrupted the courtly captain, "a secret mission, intrusted to me by the highest authority in Madrid."

"As to that, you will never guess the purpose for which we are gathered here to-night."

"A matter of some responsibility and difficulty?" Del Pino's tone and gracious movement of the head were in the nature of a general compliment to the ability and position of those present.

"Truly a man of breeding," observed one gentleman in an aside to another.

"You may speak freely. We—my friends and I—are agreed on that subject." Don Hugo waved his hand largely. "Your mission then concerns——"

"A certain gentleman, well-known, not only in these parts, but throughout the whole of Spain, a certain Don Q.," added the captain quietly.

"Come, come, Señor Capitan! We have less respect for the one-eared brigand of the *Boca de Lobo,*" laughed the governor, too busy in lighting a cigarette to notice a sudden contraction of del Pino's features. "That vulture of the rocks has troubled us too long. We were, precisely when you arrived, arranging to make an end of him."

"No doubt your plan would be successful, though it was said, in Madrid, that he had defied capture for some twenty years already, and that a score or

so expeditions sent out against him had failed," observed del Pino, with a shrug of his shoulders. "He must be a remarkable personage. I was the more gratified, therefore, at receiving orders from headquarters to come down and deal specially with a man of such interesting antecedents."

"Interesting?" it seemed as if the whole room echoed the word, and a flood of general eloquence broke forth in various details and incidents of the brigand's career.

"Can you bring yourself to conceive the last crime the fellow has committed, señor?" Don Hugo took advantage of a pause. "He had the arrogance to kidnap my own wife in the last fortnight!"

Del Pino made a gesture of horrified surprise. "She must at once be rescued!" he declared.

"Make your mind easy, I pray. She is at this moment within these walls."

"I trust he treated her as a gentleman should?" Captain del Pino asked in his soft drawl.

"On the contrary, he behaved like a monster!"

"He held her to ransom, of course?"

"No, no; not precisely," stuttered Don Hugo. "He released her—after a few hours."

"That was surely considerate."

"Far from it! The reason of his action is obvious. I wonder it does not strike you, señor."

Del Pino gazed for an instant at the governor's air of self-complacent ruffling, and shook his head.

"You must forgive my dulness, Excellency. I cannot imagine the reason."

"The ruffian was afraid to do otherwise! Naturally, on discovering the Condessa's identity, he permitted her to return home. He knows my repu-

tation, Señor Capitan! But"—with a frown—"I cannot forgive his treatment of my wife; he terrified her with shocking threats."

Del Pino's face altered. A twist, it might have been of derision or incredulity, deepened the corners of his mouth. "Of personal ill-treatment? Surely not!"

Up to this moment Don Hugo had kept the message sent down to him by the brigand absolutely secret. Prudence had suggested that, although to the person chiefly concerned such a menace might give serious cause for uneasiness, it undoubtedly also contained an element of the ludicrous. But now, carried away by the tide of his own words and anxious to convince del Pino, he disclosed it.

"His threat was directed against me. I must explain. It is well known that the brute has but one ear. I mentioned the fact openly. He appears to resent this, and swore to be revenged on me by depriving me of both of mine."

"Horrible!" Del Pino caressed his own ears meditatively. "Horrible!" he murmured. "To be without one ear would be a sufficient humiliation; but to lose both, and by the hand of an enemy, would be a mortification scarcely to be survived."

"Fortunately, none of us need fear anything of the kind," interrupted Don Hugo brusquely. "We have decided to make away with this miserable hill thief. He has been too long at large. I myself am about to lead an expedition into the sierra with that object."

"It is now hardly necessary," observed del Pino, with an accentuation of his gentle politeness.

"What; do you propose to replace me, señor?" asked Don Hugo, with heat.

1292598

"Replace you? No, Excellency; that would be impossible! But, by good luck, I may have forestalled you."

There was a simultaneous craning forward of every head. An excited quiver ran over the assembly. "What, under heaven, was this captain of the Civil Guard about to say?"

"I fail to catch your meaning, señor," said Don Hugo, but half mollified.

"It is that I had the honour to kill Don Q. yesterday!"

A profound silence of a few seconds followed this announcement.

"You killed Don Q. yesterday?" the governor almost shouted.

"Yes, Excellency, and I shall be glad to have a receipt for the body," went on del Pino immovably, "—accordingly to the regulations of my corps."

The tension of the last couple of weeks was lifted from the spirit of Don Hugo. In the enthusiasm of his relief, he flung his arms round the stonily unresponsive del Pino, and embraced him effusively on both cheeks.

"Accept our congratulations, señor. Gentlemen, let us drink to the health of this paladin, Captain del Pino!"

Which was forthwith done with many "bravas" and a hubbub of excited talk.

Del Pino's glass was filled; no one observed that he left it untouched. But he professed himself overwhelmed by their approbation; his success, he begged them to believe, was a mere matter of luck. He explained that, wishing to see the region of Don Q.'s exploits, he had left the train when approaching the mountains, and ridden the remainder

of the way. Thus he came by chance upon the brigand and shot him down.

"And now I would request his Excellency to come with me to the cell in which the body has been placed, for the purpose of identifying it," he wound up.

"By all means. Let us go without delay." Don Hugo could hardly yet credit his good fortune in thus being rid of his haunting foe. He longed to behold with his own eyes the dead face. "I have never yet seen Don Q., but they tell me the vulture is unmistakable," he added.

"Absolutely unmistakable," commented del Pino.

Don Hugo led the way from the room.

"You say the body is in a cell, señor? Why put a dead body in a cell?" he asked laughingly as they went down the corridor.

The captain of the Civil Guard smiled slightly.

"From all that is said of Don Q., Excellency, I thought it well to turn the key even on his corpse."

The governor stopped as they passed a stairway leading upwards.

"My wife is on the roof—I will tell her."

Del Pino restrained him.

"Pardon, Excellency, make sure of him first."

They descended to the level of the ordinary cells, then lower to those more remote and secured dungeons reserved for the worst criminals.

"No, no, Excellency, allow me to show you the way. The cell is already lit," del Pino's voice was heard to say as the door shut behind them.

A quarter of an hour passed, but the effervescence of excitement had not yet subsided in the assembly-room, when the door opened and a figure

stood upon the threshold. It was not that of the governor nor of del Pino. A sombrero and a cloak concealed the actual features, but the attitude and the huddled folds of the cloak bore the uncouth outlines of a vulture's plumage.

"Don Q.!" a shout of astonishment went up.

"At your service, señores. Be silent, I pray you"—a small, commanding hand rose from the cloak. "Be silent and remain seated. Remember, you have to deal with a man who is equally ready to die to-night or ten years hence. Also, if I may remind you, of a man who has never been known to neglect a precaution."

"Where is the governor?" demanded a voice, in which anger was beginning to conquer the first shock.

"Safe, señores, in a cell of his own prison, and with him is the body of a vile footpad, nicknamed El Duques, whose methods have brought discredit upon my profession, and whom I have at length punished. I undertook the function properly appertaining to the helpless Executive. Late yesterday I killed El Duques."

"But del Pino—have you killed him also?"

"He is no more, señores, I regret to inform you." Don Q. laughed sibilantly. "But do not deplore his loss, for, with the exception of his well-curled wig and his hat of the Civil Guard, he survives in me."

"You passed yourself off as Captain del Pino of the Civil Guard? But how could you impose upon any one with the body? The corpse was the corpse, you tell us, of El Duques."

"I will explain, señores. A razor passed over the skull, a little colouring on the eyelids, the re-

finement bestowed by the purging hand of death, converted it into a poor caricature of—myself." Don Q. raised his sombrero, and from the doublings of the cloak shot up the lean scraggy neck, the bald-browed malignant face, the aspect of a vulture paraphrased into human likeness. And every man there sat and looked with dumb curiosity upon the mysterious unconquerable man, whose will had dragooned the countryside for more than twenty years.

"One word more, señores. This Don Hugo committed a crime. It became necessary that I should come down from my sierra to deal with him. He made before you this evening a statement, that he has made before the public. He said that Don Q. was poorer than the meanest ass in Spain—I give you his exact words, señores—for he carried but one ear. Sit still!" His livid-lidded eyes flickered ominously upon them. "Behold, señores, one, two," he touched his ears one after the other with the hand that was not engaged in holding a pistol. "You can now as honourable men bear witness that you have yourselves counted the ears of Don Q., and that he possesses both. You will have the goodness to count those of the Governor of the prison of Castelleno—presently."

The door was softly and suddenly shut, and the lock clicked. Immediately an indescribable uproar broke out.

The Condessa, from her chair, on the house-top, heard it and sprang to her feet, for in the moonlight before her stood a figure she had seen dimly half a month earlier across the smoke and flame of a fire. She recoiled with a cry.

"Fear nothing, beautiful señora," said the soft,

hissing voice. "I come but to tell you that I have kept my word."

"What have you done?" she cried trembling.

"I have had a little interview with Don Hugo."

The lady shrieked. "His ears?"

"Will decorate my modest museum up in the mountains. But he will be, believe me, for a time at least, a better husband."

CHAPTER IX

THE DARK BROTHERS OF THE CIVIL GUARD.

THE name of Don Quebranta-huesos spelled despair to the Civil Guards of Spain. Time after time he had foiled their best-laid schemes. Yet it must be owned that he was a fair and even an appreciative enemy. He had been heard to say more than once that, but for the existence of the *guardia civile* he would, in one of his black moods, have taken his own life from sheer ennui.

He was wont to add that he owed a debt to none in the world, save only to the *guardia civile* and the ibex of the sierra. For the ibex lured sportsmen to travel up into the solitudes of the mountains, where now and again they were captured by Don Q.'s scouts and held to ransom; while the Civil Guard kept alive his interest in preserving his own life, since they were always trying to take it.

The *guardia civile* is a picked corps of military police, who possess a manual containing one of the most remarkable and noble codes of regulations the world has ever seen. Part I. opens with the following sentence: "Honour must be the chief object of the Civil Guard, and it must be preserved spotless and intact." The outcome of such a code as this, added to a gathering halo of tradition, has produced a body of men well-equipped in every sense of the word, splendidly disciplined, only to be matched by the famous Irish Constabulary.

It has been the cue of certain writers of such books as *Ten Days in Madrid,* or *With a Cook's Ticket*

Through Spain, to laugh contemptuously at the *guardias civiles,* but this only shows a crass ignorance of facts. Unless you have travelled through some of the *despoblados,* the desert tracts of Spain, or in the lonely sierra, it is hard fully to understand the duties and the qualities of a Civil Guard. He holds a roving commission to patrol the highways and mountain passes, and always works with a comrade, for the wild roads owe their safety to his presence.

Thus it will readily be seen why Don Q., in his mysterious eyrie, had long ago ceased to be a pleasing topic in the barracks of the Civil Guard, scattered throughout the towns and villages over which the shadow of the brigand hovered. He had defied them year after year, setting at nought their efforts, baffling their plans by acuteness of brain and a perfectly-systematized Intelligence Department.

If the history of the various expeditions sent up against the King of the Brigands could be set on record, the volume might pass into a standard work upon guerilla tactics and warfare. Regular troops had more than once been impressed into this service, under the guidance of the *guardias civiles;* but whether they took part in them or not, the outcome of the expeditions presented a terrible sameness.

Each started hopefully, caught goatherds and charcoal-burners and questioned them, and so pushed upwards into the black gorges. After an interval followed the inevitable return of a broken and disappointed remnant, who in many cases had not had time to build cairns over their dead, but had left them lying stark in the haunts of the ibex and the white desolation of the sierra.

Ultimately after the visit paid by the brigand to

Don Hugo, a sum, which in some eyes took on the form of a fabulous fortune, was put on the head of Don Q. Broken adventurers of different nationalities came and considered the feasibility of pocketing this tempting reward. For the most part, however, nothing resulted from these surveys, though now and again a band, more venturesome than its compeers, carried their intentions from the realm of words into that of deeds.

At this time, among his numerous foes, was counted one, perhaps the most inveterate of them all, of whom Don Q. knew nothing. Manuelo Moruno was a member of the Civil Guard, as was his brother Gregorio. They were very silent men, and, after the custom of their corps, they worked together.

It was, undoubtedly, as much the honour of the force to which they belonged, as the hope of gaining the reward and the promotion which follows upon any signal act of service, which induced these two silent brothers to swear away the life of Don Q. The affair at Castelleno, carried through in the garb of the Guard, became in their eyes an unforgivable outrage. They took their oath before one of those tragic crosses which dot the lonely bridle-paths of Spain, and it may be accepted as a fact that seldom in the course of his hazardous career had the brigand been approached by so grave a danger.

The brothers had been born close to Elche, the village of palms, which stands sentinel on the borders of the Garden of Murcia, a district that still bears many traces of the old Moorish days. Such traces the two men carried in their own persons, the melancholy of the East stamped upon their stern, dark faces. Manuelo, the elder, was a steady man,

and had in earlier days drawn back Gregorio from the wild courses of a smuggler's life. Sons of a bad father, they had broken away from their old environment, and put all their hardihood and skill upon the side of law and order.

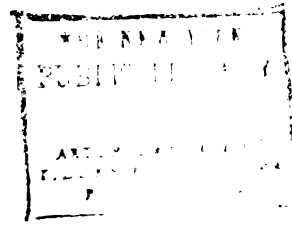
Their attitude towards each other was a mystery. Some said that Gregorio still hankered after his unregenerate days, and that it was his brother's influence alone which held him in receipt of his eight hundred and odd pesetas of pay per annum. However that might be they had for years worked together, facing death, fire, and flood, for the Civil Guard is pledged to deal with every known emergency, whether brought about by Nature or the hand of man, and frequently show a fine resourcefulness in doing so.

In the book of their special *commandancia,* there stood against their names the fact that they had been in the past somewhat unfortunate with their prisoners. They had caught many malefactors, but to the note which recorded the capture was added rather often, " Shot while attempting to escape."

It may be that neither Manuelo nor his brother trusted greatly to the ever slow and equally uncertain processes of the law. They were inclined to grudge the trouble wasted on securing a murderer, for example, who, if befriended, was sure to wriggle out of paying the penalty of his crimes by some legal quibble raised at his trial, or afterwards by interest being brought to bear in the right quarter.

So it happened that these two terrible guardians of the peace would deal personally with the more notorious offenders, waiting until some dark defile closed about them and their prisoner of the moment.

"One of the brothers would be carrying a dead body slung across his horse."



Then one or other would tell him what was about to be done, and by the time they emerged from the further end of the defile, one of the brothers would be carrying a dead body slung across his horse. Arrived at the prison, they would salute the authorities, give in the formula of attempted escape, and so away to their duties again.

Thus though they helped many lonely women in distress, guided the benighted traveller to his journey's end, saved many a life at the risk of their own in the swift hot quarrels of the South, their reputation grew, and in whatever district the two dark brothers rode their patrols, crime died out beneath their system of wild and inexorable justice.

A chance allusion to the ears of the Governor of the prison of Castelleno, flung in mockery at Manuelo, with a gibe, that he and Gregorio should try their hand at capturing the mysterious brigand, who had for so long checkmated every plot formed against him, planted a seed in the heart of the elder Moruno that soon usurped his whole thoughts.

Therefore a certain amount of interest was awakened at the headquarters of that *tercio* of the Civil Guard to which the brothers belonged, when they requested leave of absence for an indefinite term.

"You want an unusual favour, Manuelo," the commandante said to the elder, "I will see what I can do for you both. You are good men at your work, though a trifle heavy-handed."

Later a month was conceded.

"It is not enough," said Manuelo. "We will take no leave, señor."

The officer looked thoughtful.

"May I inquire where you propose to spend your leave?" he asked after a pause.

Manuelo's face grew more sombre.

"Gregorio and I have given the years of our manhood to the honour of the *guardia civile*. If we cannot have leave without words spoken, we stay—that is all, señor."

"Is it true, then, that you would go to the sierra? Have you a plan?" The officer put the question almost in a whisper.

"There is a saying in my birthplace—'A loose tongue cuts the throat,' señor."

"True. He of the sierra hears everything," the commandante said, half to himself. He stared at the blotting-pad on the table before him. He was jealous of the reputation of that portion of the corps which was under his own command. For twenty years more or less Don Q. had defied capture, —now if these two uncompromising brothers——? He looked up at the dark face of Manuelo, and what he saw there encouraged him.

"You may trust me," he said at last. "Do you want help?"

"No, señor."

"I wonder if you realize the difficulty. No one has ever got the better of—him."

"We have made a vow," returned Manuelo rigidly.

"For the second time?" The commandante referred to a previous vow which the brothers had made concerning an incendiary who had devastated the farmlands on their beat. It was from him that Manuelo had received the scar that seamed his head.

"Yes, señor, for the second time."

The sporting instinct awoke in the commandante and sent a glow through his veins. It rested with him to slip the dogs on the wild cat.

"Go," he said; "and may the saints go with you."

The plan formed by the Morunos was such a one as might have been expected from men of their character. After many discussions they decided that the chance of success lay in one direction only. By no attempt from the outside could they ever hope to reach the wary and terrible Don Q. They resolved, therefore, to make the desperate venture of following him deep into his unascertained hiding-places in the sierra, and there to gain accurate and first-hand knowledge of his habits, with, perhaps, some measure of his confidence. In a word, they were going to turn brigands and enroll themselves amongst the *sequestradores* who owed him allegiance.

It must here be understood that the Civil Guard, the courageous and courteous custodian of the roads, never stoops to be a spy. To quote their Regulations, "An act of *espionage* is wholly foreign to the office and beneath the dignity of a member of the force." Again—"Never must the Civil Guard betray a confidence." But the Morunos buoyed themselves with the excuse that in this case the end justified the means, a belief which has led the Spaniard to nearly all the wrongs he has committed.

These two dark brothers took existence very much in earnest. They had carried their lives in their hands too long and too recklessly to hesitate before the danger of an enterprise, which at any unlucky moment might place them at the mercy of

the brigand chief, whose cruelty to his foes was a matter of common knowledge. But they started hopefully, believing that, once enlisted in the band, circumstances must sooner or later conspire to give them their opportunity.

Two days later there arrived at a small village not far from Castelleno, a couple of unshaven, savage-looking men. In a safe place they had buried their passports. It is necessary in Spain for every man who goes any distance from his home to carry a passport. If he is found without it, the *carcel* is his portion till he can make matters straight. A couple of *guardias civiles* came upon the pair, the inevitable question was asked, and, as they were without papers, the brothers were arrested and taken off to the lock-up, in much the same way that they themselves had frequently arrested suspicious travellers.

Sullenly the two brothers marched to the village *carcel,* and, once within its doors, they felt the first step that was to lead them to Don Q. had been taken. Other men might have trusted somebody in power with the secret of their design, but suspicion ran like gall in the veins of Manuelo and his brother.

No human being in Spain save themselves knew that beneath the ragged hats of two muleteers in Bechivo *carcel* schemed the calculating, intrepid brains of the renowned Morunos.

The next night the lock-up was thrown into confusion when it was discovered that the prisoners had escaped. Thorough to the smallest details, or perhaps reverting to the tendencies of earlier days, Gregorio had stunned the man who took them their evening mess of pottage. A hue and cry was immediately raised after them, but the two brothers had fled beyond pursuit into the sierra.

Impossible as it was for the *guardias civiles* to get into touch with Don Q., no such difficulty hindered the Morunos in their new character of escaped criminals. Little did the charcoal-burner who sent them to the goatherd, or the goatherd who passed them on to a smuggler in hiding, imagine that by so doing they were laying bloodhounds upon the hot track of their protector, the King of the Brigands.

From one obscure hand to another, by ways too devious to follow, the new aspirants for enrolment in the robber gang gradually drifted into the presence of Don Q.

The ever-chilly chief, huddled as usual in his cloak, was sitting beside his fire when the men were brought into his presence. He raised his eyes from the book of old-world Spanish romance on his knee, in which he had been reading. A dark mood was upon him.

"Gaspár take these fellows away and make the usual examination," said the chief. "I hope, for your own sakes, that you will fulfil our requirements," he added to the brothers.

"We do not understand," Manuelo said stolidly.

Don Q. passed a slow glance over the two fine, well-set-up figures.

"By the way," he began in his soft way, that somehow sounded so deadly to his hearers, "you are, you say, newly from Malaga. There is a point upon which you can perhaps enlighten me. Is it true that the chest measurement for enlistment in the Civil Guard has been raised half an inch?" [1]

[1] These measurements are given in English terms.

The two black-haired men kept their expression of impassive dulness.

"We are poor men," answered Manuelo, "and when we see a pair of *guardias civiles* we hide in the bushes or the rocks. I do not know. And you, brother?"—he turned towards Gregorio.

"I heard that a recruit must now measure thirty-two inches round the chest if he desires to be of the corps."

Don Q. considered Gregorio's reply.

"Gaspár," he said, "I can take no more applicants into our band under thirty-three inch measurement of the chest. The height can remain the same;" then seeing a look of surprise come into the eyes of Manuelo, he added—

"If these men do not happen to reach the standard you will know what to do with them. Did any tell you on your way here that those unfit to be counted amongst our number, are also unfit to—leave us."

"We were told."

With that the Morunos were led from the cave, still wearing their air of dulness and uninterest, to be measured beside the fires in the valley below. Once Gregorio essayed a speech, but met with no reply. Then to each was given a slip of paper, and they were led back to the presence of the chief.

"You may speak, Gaspár," said Don Q.

"Their heights are five feet ten, and five feet nine, their chests measure thirty-seven and thirty-six inches, lord."

"Good. And now," Don Q. looked at Manuelo, "let me have a short history of your lives."

"We are sons of one mother, born at a birth. Our name is Forjado. They call me Miguel, and my brother they call Miguelito. Our father was

a *contrabandista.* He is dead. The *guardias civiles* —on whom be curses—shot him when we were children. A month ago we were running a cargo over the sierra on mule back. The *guardias civiles* prepared an ambush. They fired on us from behind the rocks. We fought with them and escaped, but Miguelito killed one. They had recognized us, so we fled. We entered Bechivo without papers, we were put into the *carcel.* There we met certain men who told us of the *ladron en grande,* the great *sequestradore,* Don Q."

Don Q. held up his hand for silence.

"Is not the name of Don Q. then known in your province?"

"No," replied Manuelo gruffly, the hatred of the old *guardia civile* against this imperious brigand rising to suffocation in his gorge.

Don Q. eyed him.

"It would appear that there are other things not known in your province. Do you understand me?"

"No."

"Explain, Gaspár."

Gaspár struck Manuelo heavily on the mouth.

"I have done so, lord," answered the robber.

"Do you understand now?" asked the chief.

With a fearful effort Manuelo held down the rage that possessed him.

"Yes, lord," he echoed.

"It is thus my children address me. Now proceed with your story," ordered the soft voice.

"We decided to seek refuge in the sierra. There was a stone in the courtyard. Miguelito has been a poacher. He crept up behind the guard, who brought our *puchero.* He may or may not be dead. We are here."

Thus it was that the two brothers gained admission to the ranks of the brigands. Without faltering they took the oath of fidelity and returned with Gaspár to the valley.

Nothing speaks more highly for their power of self-control, or it may be for the power of command inherent in the chief, than the fact that the brothers learned to treat Don Q. with the exaggerated respect he demanded from those about him. Had they failed in this, there is small doubt a tragedy would soon have resulted.

CHAPTER X

THE DARK BROTHERS OF THE CIVIL GUARD

BUT the days passed on; the Morunos—though it neither affected nor weakened their resolve—felt something very akin to deep respect grow up in their minds for the iron-handed, inexorable man, who, in spite of his fragile frame, held in abject subjection a bevy of the vilest characters in Spain. The courage of Don Q. was so abnormal, his indifference to death and to danger so absolute, that he compelled the unwilling admiration of the brothers.

The life of a brigand is a lazy one for the most part, and after the arrival of the Morunos the days droned by in the *Boca de Lobo* unstarred by any event of great importance.

Once acclimatized to the atmosphere of their surroundings, the taciturn brothers appeared to advance in such favour as Don Q. permitted himself to extend towards his "children."

When they laid their plans to go up into the sierra, they imagined that the chiefest of their difficulties would lie in gaining admission to the band; but once belonging to it they made sure that sooner or later opportunities would arise for two fearless men to wreak their will upon Don Q. They had forecast occasions of various favourable kinds, on foray or reconnaissance, whence they could pluck out the success they had risked so much to reach.

But herein they found themselves mistaken. Don Q. shared with certain present-day statesmen the power of keeping health without taking exercise,

and though at intervals he descended into the valley among his followers, it was but seldom that he permitted the light of day to shine upon him. For the most part he remained withdrawn in the cave which served him for a dwelling-place.

It was clearly impossible to attack him amongst his men, and though the Morunos discussed over and over again the plan of stealing up to the cave by night, and taking their chance of escape after the deed they had come to do was done, they were cast back and deterred by rumours and stories that passed from mouth to mouth round the fires. Disappointed men, rash fools, men maddened by pitiless punishment, had attempted to enter that yawning door under cloak of the darkness, but none had ever won across its ominous threshold. There had been, moreover, a hideous dissimilarity in their fates. Some had died of gunshot wounds, one had been found at the foot of the cliff with a broken neck, another at the cave-lip, stark, with horror frozen upon his face, but no mark upon all his body to tell how he died.

Manuelo listened and pondered these things.

"I would buy his life with mine, Gregorio, as thou knowest," the elder brother said; "but he is crafty as the devil. The cave is secure by reason of his craft. We must wait."

But the weeks drifted by, and the grip of winter closed more and more harshly upon the mountains; the robbers built themselves *chozas,* and, for the rest, shivered round the fires. And, far down in the Murcian plains, the commandante shook his head and invented plausible excuses for the absence of the Morunos. In his heart he feared they must be dead, for he believed in their loyalty to the utter-

most; but never in their long service had they been opposed to any foe so terrible as the immutable chief of the *sequestradores.*

It happens that there are few qualities more difficult to conceal than an ingrained self-respect and sense of respectability; and it was a quality the brothers possessed in a large degree. They tried to hide it, and their natural habit of taciturnity aided them in the effort. But a hundred eyes had been told off to watch them. They were unknowingly undergoing the scrutiny which was turned upon every new adherent of the band. For Don Q., in spite of his reckless courage, was far too great a general not to be superlatively cautious.

On a certain bitter evening in December, Manuelo with Gaspár was summoned to the cave. Although Manuelo had no premonition of it, he was about to utter a few words which in the end brought on that opportunity of dealing hand to hand with Don Q. which he had almost begun to despair of finding.

Don Q. spoke vaguely of an errand to the Sierra Segura, and desired to find a messenger acquainted with the region. The Sierra Segura is that part of the mountain-range which runs across the province of Murcia, and Manuelo had patrolled it from pass to plain during most of the years of his service in the Civil Guards.

For that very reason he denied all knowledge of it, and proclaimed himself as having been born and bred in Catalonia.

"It is unfortunate," remarked the chief regretfully, "but the matter, though important, can be delayed. Meanwhile, Gaspár, you must go down to-morrow in the early morning to the hut of the

carbonero, Tomás. I have promised him a reward for information: but you shall give it to his wife for he is a spendthrift. Miguel goes with you. Leave me, my children."

A day later Manuelo again found himself in the cave.

"Miguel," asked Don Q., "do you ever go to confession?"

A slight change passed across the man's dark face.

"No, lord," he said stubbornly, for the question somehow made him uncomfortable.

"That is a pity," returned the chief, "death is never very far from one of your profession, Miguel. It is as well to be prepared; is it not?"

"Yes, lord;" there was nothing for it but to acquiesce. The topic was ambiguous and might lead anywhere, but the next moment the man's soul thrilled with joy.

"I am thinking of making a little journey to-morrow night," went on Don Q. "You will accompany me."

"Yes, lord." Manuelo had hard work to retain his impassive aspect. The chance so long hoped for was come at last.

"I intend to go down to the little monastery of San Pedro. The fathers are very holy men, and now and again they sing masses, at my expense, for the souls of those who have perished in the mountains. I have chosen you, Miguel, for you are a man of a sober habit, not given to gambling as are some about the fires. You will now have time to prepare yourself for confession. It is sad, as I myself know, after receiving absolution of the good father, when one remembers some little peccadillo, such as the name of a man one has been forced

to kill in the way of business. And, as I should never dream of detaining a priest as captive, your opportunities may be few and far between. Make the most of this one. You may die, Miguel, before the next. *Quien sabe?*"

Manuelo left the presence of the chief filled with strong joy. At last fortune had come over to the side of himself and his brother. He sought Gregorio at the earliest possible moment with the news.

"*Gracias a Dios,*" answered the younger man; "we now have him between finger and thumb."

"You must steal away from the valley to-night brother, when the sentries change, as we have always planned. Take my rifle; it is surer than yours. Strike the bridle-path three miles eastward of the monastery, where the lagoon lies in the valley. Conceal yourself about the track. I go afoot; the enemy rides. His figure will show clear against the water. You must shoot, Gregorio, and at the echo I will spring upon him."

"I will shoot, brother; my eye is sure. Fear nothing."

The night and the day which the Morunos believed were destined to be the last Don Q. should spend on earth slipped away. Each brother in his own mind rehearsed over and over again the part he had to play in the coming tragedy. But events were fated to occur for which they had made no provision.

The moon, that was almost at the full, climbed up clear of the mountain summits before the party of two set out. They left the barren crags, patched with snow, behind them, and entered upon a region of wild and desert character, where only a few

scattered, wind-torn trees stretched their crooked branches against the brightness of the night sky.

The brothers had in their time taken so many prisoners, that Manuelo, as he walked beside the stirrup of Don Q., considered their task practically accomplished, and even found time to regret that so able and resourceful a man as the brigand chief should have passed his life elsewhere than in the ranks of the force to which he himself belonged.

"What an officer he would have made for us of the Civil Guard!" he thought, as he glanced upwards at the fragile figure, huddled in a cloak, sitting in its usual attitude of supreme dejection upon the mule.

Mile after mile was traversed. The lagoon, with its deadly watcher lying in wait, was now no great distance ahead. A jutting mountain flank here thrust its bulk between them and the moonlight. Don Q. drew rein before they entered the shadow.

"We need a lantern, Miguel," he said. "See you those two boulders leaning one against the other. Creep in between them and, to the right hand side, you will find a lantern and matches. Kindle the lantern; it will light our path through the darkness."

Manuelo bent down and crawled into the opening. His heels were just disappearing when a sound like a choked cry came from the interior of the cavity, followed by a curse and the sound of savage fighting.

Don Q. nodded his head at the noise, and began to dismount in his leisurely fashion.

"Have you secured him, my children?"

"Yes, lord."

"Then pull him out into the moonlight."

The order was obeyed, and Manuelo, bound and black with rage, was placed before the chief.

"You are a very clever man, my good Manuelo Moruno," Don Q. began in his soft, sneering voice, "too clever, I should have thought, to commit the gross blunder of denying all knowledge of Murcia with a strong Murcian burr on your tongue. That pretty fable of having been born and bred in Catalonia should have been supported by the use of a few bastard French words. Thus you might have played your part very creditably. As it is I am told that the wife of Tomás the *carbonero,* to whose hut I sent you yesterday, made the sign of the cross when she saw your dark face at her door. She is a Murcian, and she recognized you, as I expected. You and your brother seem to have gained yourselves a pretty reputation in Murcia."

Manuelo stood silent.

"And Gregorio, where is he?" continued the chief.

"He at least has escaped you," burst out Manuelo.

"So? We shall see. I do not remember giving him permission to leave the valley. Yet he left it last night; and at this moment, good Manuelo, he lies above the path beside the lagoon watching for us. We will not keep him waiting. I have been told he is a sure shot. We will test his aim. Put this traitor on the mule, my children."

Manuelo was lifted into the saddle, a noose slipped round his ankles was secured beneath the belly of the mule, a gag was thrust between his teeth, and when he was bound and helpless, Don Q. with his own hands artistically arranged the folds of a cloak about his shoulders.

"Now, Manuelo, we will take the road. As for

you, my children, return to the head of the valley that leads into the *Boca de Lobo*. I no longer need your help."

So the journey was resumed.

"I understand, Manuelo," went on the soft voice of Don Q., "that you and your brother have been ambitious of meeting me alone in some solitary spot. Is it not so? You are about to have your desire. Gregorio will mistake you for me. He will remember the heavy blood money that is upon my head, and will send his bullet straight. The result may surprise him a little, but in this world it is never wise to count upon results."

The progress of the mule, regulated by the pace of the terrible man who walked so delicately behind it, was slow, and before the spread of water with the moon shining upon it came into view, Manuelo had plenty of time to realize his position. It was little wonder that by degrees it affected even his iron nerves. Not far ahead Gregorio was waiting, with his rifle on his knee, ready to fire, not dreaming that the muffled figure on the mule was not Don Q., but his own brother.

The first part of the lagoon was bordered by gritty sand, a flat surface without any cover where Gregorio could hide; but later the bank rose abruptly, set thick with boulders and thorn bushes. Manuelo searched the tangled shadows with eyes that ached. Outwitted and outmatched as he was, he almost forgot his wrath in the tension of those moments. If only he could make some sign of warning whereby Gregorio might escape the cruel vengeance of the chief! For himself, he could rely on the accuracy of his brother's markmanship.

While he still listened, the earth seemed suddenly

to reel and give way beneath him, and he knew no more. After he had fallen, the bark of Gregorio's rifle reached Don Q.

The chief stood back in the shadow of a rock and watched the active figure of Gregorio leaping down the slope.

"Where are you, brother? Is he stunned? I shot the mule under him when I saw you alone were with him," said Gregorio, stooping over the fallen animal and his rider.

The dim shape by the rock laughed and sprang at the same instant. Beneath the iron-bound musket-butt, which descended on his head, Gregorio went down kicking feebly on the sand. Don Q.'s delicate little hands pinioned him with a rapid and scientific completeness. Then he turned to Manuelo, tore the gag from his mouth, and with a strength surprising in so fragile a body, pulled him free of the dead mule. He rolled the brothers into a sitting posture against the moonlit rock-face, dashed water over them and finally sat down in front of them to watch their return to consciousness, breaking now and then into shakings of sibilant laughter.

Manuelo, who had been stunned when the mule collapsed, was the first to regain a knowledge of what so much concerned him. His eyes took in the whole scene, the fallen mule, his brother bound beside him and the cloaked figure in front. He spoke no word, but Don Q. read much in the flare of hatred with which the black eyes turned upon him.

"We will wait until our excellent Gregorio, whose shooting is so admirable, has regained his senses sufficiently to join in our conversation," Don Q. began, as Gregorio with a groan shifted his head from one bump on the rock to another, and blinked

up dizzily at the moon. "He is already better. I trust, Gregorio, that your thoughts are quite clear?"

The man shivered, then scowled. Recollection had come to him also.

"I wish you both to listen to me very carefully," the chief pursued. "We have played a very interesting game together, Manuelo, for yours is the brain behind it. But I do not think I flatter myself when I say that the honours rest with me?"

"Yes, we have lost the game," said Manuelo, in the old rigid manner. "But we are not afraid!"

"You are a brave man," commented Don Q. politely; "but because you are not afraid now, it does not follow that you will not be afraid before we have done with one another."

"What does it matter?" answered Manuelo. "My brother and I took an oath to kill you. We have failed. Nothing remains but to make an end of us."

"Not so fast, Manuelo," put in the chief. "I have just been thinking how full of romance is your situation. You and Gregorio are twins. You were born together, you have lived and worked together, and now in the fitness of things you are to die together."

"And," resumed the brigand, "believe me, I should not interfere with so artistic a conclusion had I only ourselves to think of. But I cannot afford to forget that you have both belonged to that estimable force, to whose kind interest in my life I owe so deep a debt. It is incumbent upon me to send them information by a reliable hand—say by one of you—how a Civil Guard dies, who has failed in a duel with Don Q. I trust you follow me?"

The two men stared at him stolidly.

"It is clear that you do. There are, to return to my subject, many channels by which the whole story will find its way down to the plains. But that is not sufficient for my purpose. I wish the Civil Guard to know from the lips of one of their own corps that I have scored another point in the twenty years' gamble that has been played out between us. I have therefore decided that one of you shall go free. The other must die, and—well, I warn you he will need all his fortitude before the happy moment of his departure from life. You are brave men; choose, then, between you which shall go free and which shall—remain for ever in the sierra."

Don Q. moved away a little space and the brothers began to talk eagerly together in low tones. At the end of five minutes the chief returned.

"Well," he asked, "I am waiting for your decision. Who is to be the lucky one?"

"Gregorio," shouted Manuelo at once.

"No, no, Manuelo, I cannot," declared the other hoarsely.

"There seems to be a slight difference of opinion; shall I decide the matter for you?"

"I will decide," said Manuelo; "I have the right of choice before my brother, since I am the elder."

"No, no!" cried the other passionately; "I will not buy life at such a price."

Don Q. held up his hand.

"It is enough. You cannot agree. The decision must be mine, for I regret I have not time (interesting as it would be) to listen to an argument between you——"

Manuelo broke into his speech.

"Hear me," he groaned; "Gregorio has a wife and child. Let him go!"

"The choice is in my hands, and in my hands it must remain," Don Q. answered; "I have decided. Gregorio shall go free after he has looked upon his brother's death. I have chosen him, not because he has a wife and child waiting for him in Murcia, but because, being readier of speech than our stiff-tongued Manuelo, he will render a more vivid picture of what he has witnessed."

The soft flow of the chief's voice neither rose nor fell. Gregorio shuddered violently.

"I will not witness it;" he cried. "Shoot us both, in the name of the Virgin!"

"Be reasonable," said Manuelo. "For my sake, Gregorio, go free. Why should two die? Besides, the thought that you live will be with me when the Quebranta-huesos is doing his worst. We Morunos do not know fear."

There followed a silence, during which the chief stood like a dormant bird, his cloak half fallen on the sand at his feet. The water of the lagoon rustled under a ripple of wind about its rimming stones. The cry of a green plover struck the keynote of sorrow on the night air.

"Other men beside you, Manuelo, other brave men have challenged me to do my worst, and, with one exception, I have always lived to hear their vain appeals for mercy." Don Q.'s low tone had an echo of weariness.

"Now hear me, Manuelo; what if I give you also your life?"

The man did not reply at once; then he said—

"Why mock me? Speak plainly."

"I do not mock you. I have many faults in the

eyes of men, but it is well-known that I never lie. Is it not so?"

"That is so."

"Tell me then, Manuelo, the truth in return. What if I let you go free also?"

The love of life was strong in Manuelo. Who knows what struggle went on in his breast at that moment?

"It is impossible, señor," he said at last, "it is impossible. We have taken an oath that while life remains in our bodies we will seek your life. If you spare us now we will come again. Shoot me and be done with it. We are honourable men."

Don Q. burst into a shriek of hissing laughter.

"Manuelo, go free!" he cried. "See now I give myself into your hands. Go back to Murcia, and when your vow troubles you, come again and cross swords and wits with the king of the *sequestradores*. I really feel quite indebted to you, Manuelo. You have given me something to look forward to, an added zest to life, for death stares at me for ever from your eyes. And although I have outgrown most of the human weaknesses, I still have in my heart a warm feeling for a very brave man."

CHAPTER XI

A THREE-CORNERED GAME

ALTHOUGH that romance, which constitutes the softening mist through which posterity is wont to read the blurred pages of history, has dealt almost as lovingly with the great Spanish brigand as with any kindred creation of time or fancy, one point on which Don Q. much insisted has never been sufficiently recognized by the world at large—the point being that there are two classes of men who follow the career of robbery. There is the petty *peseta*-wolf—the penny-thief—who is the dread of the *fiesta*-loving peasant; far above him is the *sequestrador*—the great robber who holds to ransom—the king of the mountains. For perhaps three decades the safe conduct of Don Q. was, in certain regions, a far more efficacious document than that of his sovereign.

It is not too much to say that there were two Don Q.'s. The one a sneering, vengeful, tiger-hearted brigand, who dealt in death, pain, and blood-stained money; the other a charming, soft-spoken gentleman, full of courtesy and culture. But one quality remained always apparent, which ever side of his character happened to be uppermost—the man was a most terrible enemy. "He knows no fear," wrote a prisoner of his on one occasion, "nor do I think he has ever known it. Yet he owns an imagination that cuts like a knife to the heart of things. It is this faculty of placing himself in the position of his foes that has so long enabled

him to baffle all designs made against his liberty and his life."

But of this particular point in Don Q.'s character Don Felipe Majada thought not at all as he lay at ease in a long chair and gazed up at the glorious blue sky of Spain—that country which only smiles when the sun shines. The wind rustled softly in the garden below the balcony where he sat—a balcony as broad and shady as a cloister. A cigarette dropped from his fat lips; his fat hands were loosely clasped upon his waist-sash; but though his body was extended at ease there was no smile of enjoyment playing over his features, for Don Q., from being a neighbour with whom he could very well live at peace, was now become a thorn in his side.

In the past the relations between the successive governors of the ancient white city and the great *sequestrador* had not been unfriendly. "Live and let live" is an excellent axiom of life. But in recent years Don Q. had made the mistake (in Don Felipe's eyes), of capturing more than one Englishman, with the result that the British Government took a hand in the game, and peremptory orders from Madrid came down with wearisome reiteration to the effect that Don Q. must be definitely got rid of at the earliest opportunity.

But Don Q. had terrorized the district for uncounted years in the past, and, Don Felipe ruefully reflected, was likely to go on terrorizing it for all any one could do during as many years to come.

It was all very well for the head-quarters people at Madrid to say that the powerful robber must be removed out of hand, but how was such a result to be brought about? Don Felipe considered that he had made a superlative effort in this direction when

he sent Don Luis into the sierra to poison the chief. The scheme, alas! failed, and ever since the shadow of Don Q. had lain cold across the life of the governor. Moreover, lately the terrible brigand had come down into the plains and actually outdone his former exploits. Consequently an ultimatum had that morning arrived from Madrid which said that if Don Q. was not captured or effaced within seven days, the governorship would be given into more capable hands.

"Ah, most beautiful," said Don Felipe aloud, shifting his fat back to a more convenient niche in the deep chair, "life has many trials, but it is only when the heart is broken that one tastes despair."

The woman he addressed moved her fan a little faster. She looked handsome and defiant, this full-throated, deep-bosomed Andalusian with magnificent sulky eyes, and the trace of dark down on her upper lip, giving, in Don Felipe's opinion, the last touch of piquancy to her beauty.

"Have you no words, my Rosita?" he said again, with a piteous accent.

"What shall I say?" she raised her heavy eyelids. "How does one show despair? Does one grow fat upon it?"

"Do not mock me, I implore you!" continued Don Felipe. "It is on account of this carrion bird of the sierra that I shall be thrust from my place. To-day I am one of the highest officials of the State, in seven days—*caramba!*—I shall be——"

"Without money, position, or credit," concluded Rosita, giving every word its full value of sound while the listener felt each as a blow.

"Unless I get rid of Don Q. within seven days!" Don Felipe repeated, "Don Q., mark you, Rosita,

the abominable brigand who has defied all efforts to capture him since before I became governor, for years, for decades!"

Rosita's lip curled, showing her pretty teeth. She exercised a great influence over the heart of the widower who had been the husband of her dead cousin—a great influence but not quite strong enough to gain the point she desired. She laughed with a touch of mockery.

"Some men would not acccept defeat so easily," she remarked. "Sooner than that you would go single-handed into the sierra."

"I? Single-handed into the sierra? The saints forbid!"

"But think," she urged still smiling, "how life will appear to you without money, position, honour, credit! Is it not worth the risk?"

"You do not understand!" exclaimed the Governor, his voice rising to the treble note of excitement. "You do not understand. It is death to face him!"

Rosita shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"So I have heard, but it is as good a fate as the other—to my mind." Her eyes burned so fierce a scorn that even Don Felipe Majada's dull nerves quivered.

"Ah, my most beautiful, you do not understand!" he repeated helplessly. "You are far from understanding. This vulture hates me. If I were in his grip"—he shuddered—"he would kill me. Not by an easy death, Rosita, by inches. He is a terrible man."

"He is at least a brave one!"

"Brave?" echoed the governor. "He was born

lacking the nerve of fear! He would face an entire army alone."

"Whereas you," she pointed her fan at him with a little mocking gesture, "would head the army in running away. Is it not so?"

The governor sat up, puffing out his cheeks, with some idea of protesting.

"Doña Rosita, you forget that I——"

She took the words from his lips, laughingly shaking her head.

"On the contrary, my Felipe, I remember that you——"

Don Felipe occupied himself in rolling another cigarette with care, reflecting meanwhile that he had made a false step in confiding the state of affairs to Rosita, towards whom his feelings, though strong, were so annoyingly divided. He half feared, half loved her. He leant upon the higher force of her character, yet resented her power over him. Long ago, in the early flush of his admiration, he had spoken of marriage; now he had not the smallest intention of binding himself irrevocably to that compelling will.

But Rosita's heart was tempestuous with ambition, and not at all with love. Born of ill-matched parents, her father a man of noble family, her mother sprung from a very different class, she had resolved to even the social odds against herself by becoming the wife of the Governor. But Don Felipe, indolent and cowardly though he might be, was hard to drive and to hold. He had a hundred shifty fashions of eluding her pursuit, yet he always returned, allured by her beauty, and, unconsciously, by the moral support and help he derived from her counsel in his difficulties.

"You are cruel," he said at last, "more cruel than the government, Rosita."

"You will find many of your friends cruel when you no longer are Governor of the province," she rejoined.

Don Felipe cast away his cigarette. He wrung his hands. How wretchedly exact this prophecy was he well knew. In sheer distress he wailed out the true object of his visit.

"What am I to do? You, who have so often counselled me, do not desert me now, my beloved! You, who are my Minerva and my Venus, tell me what I am to do."

"But why should I?"

"Because our destinies are bound together," he responded with fervour, hoping to pass an awkward point with a pretty paraphrase."

"That promise of marriage—you will fulfill it?" Her dark eyes flashed out on him.

"The day of Don Q.'s death. I swear it."

Majada was not so shy of giving his oath on this subject as one might expect, because he had given it once before, and shuffled out of the responsibility.

"Is that true?" Rosita asked, rising from her seat, and standing over him.

"On the honour of a Majada!"

Perhaps this warrant was less satisfying than it sounded, but Doña Rosita accepted it. Her fan waved rapidly for a few moments.

"As you will not take my suggestion of going into the sierra——"

"Which is impossible!" interjected Don Felipe resolutely.

"We must turn to some trick to tempt Don Q.

down into the plains—into your power," she continued.

Majada pursed his lips and shook his head in disappointment.

"Tricks have been tried times without number—and failed. No trap can tempt him," he asserted dolefully.

"Not if baited with a woman?" Rosita's splendid eyes looked coquettishly at him over the edge of her fan.

"Ah, lovely angel!" exclaimed her admirer amorously, "I yield, I melt at that glance. But Don Q.——" he snapped his finger and thumb, "he cares no more than his own mountains even for beauty as glorious as yours!"

"That may be," she replied. "For all that I will tell you a plan by which you may draw the chief out of the sierra within three days."

"Draw Don Q. into the plains within three days?"

"Yes—if you do exactly as I say."

"Then we can capture him easily," cried the governor. "Jewel of a Rosita! Are you sure you can perform this miracle?" She nodded, smiling.

"How, how?"

"By playing upon what is best in him."

"Best in him? He is a bloodthirsty ruffian."

"He has never harmed a woman."

"True, true."

"Your country house is empty. You must imprison me there—because I refuse to marry you."

"Oh!" commented Don Felipe dubiously.

"I will implore the assistance of Don Q. by a letter. He will come down in person to release me. I will tell him in the letter that you are sending some wine through the mountains in the hope that

he will intercept it, and so die, for the wine will be poisoned. This you must also do, and so prove my good faith in the eyes of the chief."

"It is a magnificent plan, my Rosita, and worthy of you," exclaimed Don Felipe in genuine admiration. "I have but to conceal two or three score men in the gardens of the Casa de Segli—we will seize him."

"And you will remain governor," she added.

"With the most beautiful wife in Spain!" he gazed at her fervently.

He had risen and stood beside her. She looked back at him for a moment.

"I wonder, my Felipe, what kind of a wife I shall make you," she replied.

"What kind of a wife she will make me," echoed the stout lover as he drove homewards along the streets, his glance fixed on the distant crests of the sierra, "I shall fear to test that result, my most beautiful. If she were jealous of me! *Caramba!* the old vulture yonder is not more fierce than she. But we are not yet married, no! There are still three of us. You, Rosita, myself, and that other, Don Q. as they call him. I will first rid myself of the brigand—then when I am safe—ah—we shall see."

In the long state of war which existed between the brigand chief, and the authorities pitted against him, it must be admitted Don Q. was the more scrupulous in the choice of weapons used. He never could be brought to understand that they regarded him as one beyond the pale of humanity, as vermin against whom any means of destruction was permissible. So it came to pass that the letter

of Doña Rosita de Rivero, which betrayed the plot of the convoy of poisoned wine intended to fall into his hands, lit in his mind a cold and deadly fury against Don Felipe.

"This over-gorged carrion would endeavour a second time to poison me!" he reflected. "Am I a rat or a dog that he should do this? He must be taught. He has imprisoned this girl moreover. Yes, he must be taught."

For hours after receiving the letter he brooded vengefully, buried in one of his fits of deep depression. It annoyed him considerably that any one should attempt to compass his death in a manner so unworthy. But the longer he thought the more wary he became. Suspicion was as gall in his veins, and he possessed a fine capacity for putting himself in the place of his enemies, and looking upon their probable line of action from their standpoint.

So for many hours the chief brooded in his cave, for when time permitted he liked to consider every possibility of the game. He held brigandage to be as honourable a profession as that of a soldier, a more artistic one in truth, and giving greater scope for the display of strategic ability, in that the odds against the brigand were the heavier.

After these hours of silence, he went to a table that stood in one corner of his cave and began to write. They were but a few lines which ran somewhat as follows. He kissed the hand of the lovely Doña Rosita. He thanked her for the hint she sent him, and he would take steps for her deliverance on the coming Friday evening. He paused for a moment as if about to add more, then sealed the letter and called Robledo.

The young fellow came running up the pathway to the cave-mouth.

"Bring also Antonio," was the order.

Don Q. looked keenly from the worn handsome face of Robledo to his companion's. Antonio was a meagre man, with a cunning twist of the features, set in habitual discontent. Scattered tufts of hair decorated his cheeks and chin, over which his hand wandered nervously while he bore the scrutiny of his chief.

"A week ago," began Don Q. at last, in his quiet voice, "your appearance offended my artistic susceptibilities, which are very strong. I ordered you to grow hair on your face to cover your deficiencies. It is slow in coming."

"Pardon, lord," the robber shifted his feet uneasily.

"I fear that if you remain in the mountains," pursued Don Q., "my fastidiousness may perhaps carry me away, and I shall be forced to take measures to remove from the face of nature so unpleasant a blot as yourself. No one would regret this more than I, therefore I have decided to lessen the temptation by sending you on a mission into the plains. Here is a note."

A flash passed over the man's face.

"I perceive you are glad to leave us," remarked the chief urbanely.

Antonio stammered some denials. Don Q. held up his hand.

"I am about to trust you. I pray you may prove yourself worthy of the honour. I am about to put my life in your keeping." Antonio strove to maintain a quiet aspect. "This letter must be placed in the hands of the lady whom you will find de-

tained at the Casa de Segli. Take care that by no chance it falls into the hands of Don Felipe Majada —my life would pay the penalty. You understand?"

"Yes, lord."

"Then go."

Don Q. looked after the man with that quiver of his drooping eyelids which with him betrayed amusement or anger. "A very meagre intellect," he murmered. "That insect will do exactly as I calculate; he will endeavour to betray me."

Then he turned to the second of his followers, who stood waiting meekly.

"For you, Robledo, I have a double mission," the chief resumed, in his soft, sibilant tones. "Go down to the shrine of San Pedro and beg one of the good fathers to come up into the mountains to the Gorge of the Torrent. Say that his presence will be urgently needed on Friday evening. They are good men, and moreover know that I am a patron of the church. Further——" He bent forward and whispered for a few moments in the ear of the young man.

CHAPTER XII

A THREE-CORNERED GAME

Now followed two days of apparent inaction on the part of Don Q. The weather was glorious, and through the sun-smitten afternoons there was a constant coming and going in the *Boca de Lobo.* Brigands who had held converse with charcoal-burners, goatherds, peasant women, or kept watch upon the bridle-paths, streamed almost without intermission into the cave where the chief sat huddled by his fire. He issued his orders characteristically, and no one of those who received or fulfilled them could see whither they led. Yet his plan was clear and needed but the passage of a couple of days to develop it.

Don Felipe Majada and the lady of his love had conceived only one course of action open to Don Q. They imagined him setting forth in person to the rescue of the distressed damsel. But the chief possessed in a high degree the power of seeing into the minds of his enemies, and the policy of counter-stroke appealed very strongly to his subtle intelligence.

He arranged, therefore, to slash in a counterblow. And following, as he pondered with gratification, the example of Lord Wellington at Salamanca, and of many other notable generals in other parts of the world, both before and since, had decided to relieve the pressure upon Doña Rosita in the Casa de Segli by attacking the governor in another place.

The sun had already passed overhead and was

dropping in the fierce blue sky when the chief mounted his fragile frame on an ambling mule and led a body of his followers downwards towards the plains. By many bridle-paths they passed, over wild scrub-grown areas, through glimmering summer woods, until in the splendid glow of evening they came to where a rugged path wound and tumbled through the lower ravines. Here a charcoal-burner rose from a thicket in which he had been crouching.

With his eyes on the ground he told of the passing of a convoy with wine for the Casa de Segli. That was sixteen hours ago. He had kept watch ever since.

"We have secured the convoy. And the soldiers?" inquired Don Q.

"They also passed, my lord, in the dark before the dawn. I could count sixty, but others went by in the gloom. There were more than sixty."

"Good. You shall be rewarded, Tomás."

"The saints watch over my lord of the mountains, and have him in their holy keeping!" exclaimed Tomás in pious gratitude.

"I trust so, I trust so, Tomás," returned the brigand mildly. "And now, my children, forward. The soldiers will enjoy a quiet evening in the pleasant gardens of the Casa de Segli. We will not disturb them."

It was deep in the night in the streets of that white and ancient city where Don Felipe held office. The watchmen had just cried the hour with the facts that the night was black and the stars hidden, when six men in Indian file slipped noiselessly through the shadows under the sleeping houses, and paused by the wall of the governor's residence. Then their

Don Q. led a body of his followers downwards towards the plains.

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

leader, drawing on more tightly his long muffling cloak, delivered an order or two, something flopped softly down from the balcony above, and a slender figure passed by a rope ladder into the window overhead.

History is uncertain as to whether it was a man or a woman who met him, but, in any case, the accomplice—for Don Q. had friends everywhere, equally in the little local courts of officials as in the huts of the goatherds—holding the thin hand of the chief drew him through a passage or two, and left him before a high closed door.

Don Q. took from his belt a knife, turned the handle of the door, and walked in. A faint lamp burned beside the bed. The brigand stepped up into the circle of its light, and tapped the sleeper sharply on the ear.

The Governor awoke. Surely this was some horrid nightmare, this vision of a vulture-face, and fierce, flickering eyes! But, nightmare or no, frightful tremors shook Don Felipe as he lay breathless.

"Do not presume to utter a sound," commanded Don Q.

The Governor's face, bulged with terror, peered from the bedclothes. If he could but rouse himself, and clap his hands to scare away this monstrous bird of the sierra, he felt his dream must end. But this he had no power to do. He could only stare in a paroxysm of grotesque helplessness at his visitant.

"Rise at once and come with me," went on the urbane, inexorable voice. "Dress warmly for it is chilly in the mountains, and I should never forgive myself if you were to contract a pneumonia."

At the word "mountains" Don Felipe's jaw fell.

He found his tongue at last, but the sound it sent forth was like the bleating of a kid.

"Wh—who are you?—I refuse to go with you."

"You will not I am sure do anything so rash as refuse. You cannot know that it is Don Q.'s shadow which lies across your face. Corpse of a scullion! Do not keep me waiting! My patience has its limits. I have ripped up a man for less."

Sunrise saw the governor woe-begone and chilled, bound on a pony with rough paces, mounting higher and ever higher into those sierra he had hitherto beheld only in terrified visions of the night. The keen-edged wind, now blowing in through the passes, would warm later when noon laid her hot hand over the mountain sides. Don Felipe shivered in vain. No one took the smallest heed of his discomfort, and the attenuated form riding ahead seemed to feel cold as little as fear. This was Friday—what had happened? It was the day on which Don Q. had promised in his letter to deliver Doña Rosita. What was going to become of him, Felipe?

The air was growing warm by the time they encamped in the Gorge of the Torrent, a remote and lonely spot, seldom trodden by the foot of man. Dark trees overhung the stream, now dwindling under the summer sun. Altogether it appeared to Don Felipe a likely place where even a governor and a *cacique* might be murdered, and no one be the wiser but the carrion birds of the sierra and their human likeness.

The chief had disappeared into the shelter of a *choza*, a hut of wattle and grass, and Don Felipe, lying under a tree close at hand, felt little appetite for the food served to him on a leaf.

Soon a sibilant voice called from the *choza*.

"Bring the prisoner here, Robledo." And in a moment the governor stood transfixed under the heavy-lidded gaze of the great *sequestrador*. He stood within the gloom of the hut, a small fire smouldering on the ground at his feet.

"You are Don Filipe Majada?"

The fat captive quaked and bowed.

"I have received some complaints of your conduct towards a lady," went on Don Q. politely. "I trust you will find yourself able to demolish these accusations."

Don Felipe feebly shook his head. His throat was dry, and speech far beyond him.

"It pains me greatly," resumed the brigand, "to be obliged to touch on so delicate a subject; but I am given to understand that you have pestered a lady with your attentions. I trust for your own sake that gossip rather than truth lies at the root of these reports?"

"They are false, señor," gasped Don Felipe in an agony of apprehension. "I swear they are false!"

"Then how can you explain this?" demanded Don Q., handing him the letter that he and Doña Rosita had concocted together only four days earlier.

Majada read it, wagging his head and grimacing in sheer terror, as he strove to speak.

"It is all false. She loves me!" he blurted at last.

"And the wine?" questioned Don Q. "Bring here a bottle, Robledo."

It was laid at his feet.

"Do you recognize this bottle?"

"No, no!" Majada almost screamed.

"Then will you gratify me by taking a glass with me. You appear overcome. A glass of good wine is a restorative," Don Q. urged with suave gravity. "Come, let us drink to our happy meeting."

"No, no! I—do not drink wine."

"I am of a trustful nature, but this I cannot believe. After all, I fear the story I have heard must be true," commented the brigand. "What do you deserve? Not death only, but *a* death."

"Spare me, spare me!" howled Don Felipe, grovelling. "It was not my fault. Send this man away and I will tell you all. No one else must know."

Don Q. smiled sourly, and raised his eyebrows.

"This man already knows," he said trenchantly, nodding at Robledo.

"It is impossible! Hearken to me, señor. Have mercy on me!" and there on his knees with his hands stretched for mercy, Don Felipe gave his rendering—the ancient rendering of Adam—of all that had passed between himself and Doña Rosita. In spite of his sobs and blunders, the meaning was plain, that he was not to blame for the nefarious plot against the life of this estimable gentleman, whom folks called Don Q., and who had a whim for living secluded in the mountains.

A long and heavy silence fell upon the group. Don Felipe exhausted by his efforts found himself crying dumbly. At last Don Q. spoke.

"This lady loves you?"

"She adores me! She would marry me in spite of myself," mumbled the other.

"How fortunate . . . for you."

"What do you mean?"

"That I am about to send for her, Don Felipe. If she loves you, she will come."

"It is impossible. My servants have her in charge."

"Take a pen and write to your majordomo, or whoever happens to be in command at the Casa de Segli, ordering that the Señorita de Rivero be allowed to accompany the bearer of your letter. No more."

"I repeat," stammered Majada, "that it is impossible."

"How unlucky!"

"The poor soul would be terrified to accompany your brigands."

Don Q. glanced at him queerly.

"If she fancies you, how much more, think you, will she admire this stalwart fellow?" He pointed at Robledo.

"She will not come; I am sure of it," persisted the prisoner.

"How unlucky—as I said before—for you!"

"You are chivalrous—she is a woman," pleaded Don Felipe, overwhelmed with the fear that Doña Rosita would turn the tables on him if she came into the presence of the bandit.

"Señor," said Don Q., in his softest manner, "write the letter; and if you have any influence with Doña Rosita, as you say you have, use it to bring her here."

Resistance was hopeless. Majada's shaking hand produced the words.

"You have finished?" demanded the chief, gently.

"Yes," puffed Don Felipe.

"Then add this postscript. If she loves you it will cause her to fly to your side." The exquisite

courtesy of the brigand's manner only deepened with each sentence. "Write, señor: 'Don Q. desires me to add that if you are not here by eight o'clock I shall be buried at a quarter past.'"

"Señor," protested Majada miserably, "this—is——"

"The truth—no more."

The long hours passed of that delicious day of the early Spanish summer. Lying in the shade of pleasant trees, the sunlight seeming to glitter through the pure air of the sierra, and with as much as one needed to eat, drink, and smoke, what more could a man desire for absolute content? Don Q. urged this point of view upon his captive. But in vain. Don Felipe remained plunged in the wretchedness of anticipation, though he gave to his depression the name of anxiety about Doña Rosita.

"When she comes, we will have a talk and apportion the guilt," returned the chief agreeably. "She is an important witness. Now, señor, you know the course that events will take. Let us dismiss all thoughts of the future; the future will take care of itself. In the meantime the air of our mountains is excellent. I have packets of tobacco from Havana, also excellent; and most excellent of all, some wine of the Doradillo grape. I foresee that we may sing a song together, and gossip of the old romances. You shall tell me of the life from which I have divorced myself, and I will relate to you how many of your old acquaintances came to me in the mountains, and—how some of them left me."

But not even this programme appealed to Don Felipe Majada. He drank wine, but more and more he steeped himself in the gloom of terror. Talk he could not, and the chief presently excused himself,

saying he would indulge in a siesta. But no sleep came to the tired eyes of the Governor. What would be the result of Rosita's arrival? How much would she betray? Could nothing be said, be done, to save himself from the vengeance hovering over him?

The lazy Spanish day droned sweetly to its close, the grass on which he lay cooled under the breath of evening. The scene outspread before him was admirable, the wild gorge with its view of distant bluish plains backed by a sunset sky relucent with those delicate unnameable hues that interfuse about a sunset without clouds.

The valleys had fallen into shadow, but light lingered strongly upon the mountains. Don Q. seated alone in the *choza* considered the position. In spite of the somewhat damaging reports brought up from the city by Robledo, he could not bring himself to believe in the Governor's story of Rosita's guilt. The chief found it hard to suspect a woman. For the sake of one woman, whose name never crossed his lips and about whom you may be told a story, he chivalrously regarded all women, protected them when necessary, though as far as possible he eschewed having anything to do with the sex.

"This fatted animal," he reflected, "has evidently ill-treated the señorita, whichever way the truth lies. She has been in his power, now he is in mine. Very good. I must do justice to both if I can—to the lady if a choice is afforded me."

He sighed and rolled another cigarette. He began to see his way dimly.

Soon the slight bustle of some arrival on the little plateau under the ilex trees reached his ears. He

waited but a moment before he called for Robledo. The young bandit, handsome, panting, travel-worn, appeared at the opening of the *choza.*

"You have done my bidding?"

"The lady is here, lord."

"Good." The chief pondered a short time, and gave some orders before he commanded that Don Felipe Majada and the lady should be brought before him.

Doña Rosita had never looked more handsome. A coquettish *velo,* fastened with a crimson flower, covered her dark head, and she moved with a sort of defiant majesty.

Don Q. rose and bowed before her, sweeping his sombrero to the ground. If his aspect chilled her courage she showed no sign. Lifting her haughty eyes upon him she demanded why they had inflicted upon her this horrible journey through the mountains, following upon an imprisonment so painful and so degrading?

As a matter of fact, Doña Rosita was in a very bad temper indeed. It appeared to her that the plot had miscarried through some imbecility of Don Felipe's, and she foresaw herself in a very unpleasant position when the folks down in the ancient white town got hold of the particulars. Don Felipe in his official position was a distinctly desirable husband, but the same man outwitted and discredited by the great *sequestrador,* and thrust from the emoluments and dignities of his various functions under government was the reverse. But her spirit rose, she was not yet conquered.

"I crave your pardon, fairest señorita," began the chief, with sibilant fluency. "I am to blame. This love-lorn gallant implored me not to put you

to so much inconvenience for his sake. But a certain story he has told me requires to be investigated. Without your delightful presence I could do nothing. The sight of your beauty has refreshed my dim eyes, your amiability my poor heart," again the sombrero swept the dusty floor.

Doña Rosita bit her lip with a look askance at the suave gentleman, whose ominous gaze flickered over her, but whose fragile and emaciated, delicate hands spoke of ill-health and weakness.

She bowed coldly.

"What would you know of me? Ask your questions and let me be gone. Give me my liberty, señor."

"But certainly. It will be my happiness to secure the liberty of the lovely Doña Rosita. Condescend to hear me."

Don Q. recited the story of the plot as it had been told him by Majada.

As he went on, Don Felipe assumed more and more the appearance of a pricked windbag. His folds of flesh seemed to hang more loosely, his bloated cheeks to fall into more obvious jowls. When at the close Rosita turned her flashing regard upon him, his shaking knees gave way altogether, and he sank in a sitting posture to the ground.

The lady did not speak for a long moment, she pierced the unhappy Governor with a silent gaze. Then sweeping round upon Don Q. she advanced to the door of the hut, within which he stood.

"Grant me a moment, señor," she implored, "out of the hearing of all these ears," she waved a contemptuous fan at the guards who had accompanied her. "Let me enter the *choza* and tell you all the truth."

Don Q. signified his acquiescence, and bade his men draw off.

"Order this traitor to come, too." Doña Rosita touched Majada on the shoulder. "He shall be forced to tell the truth."

Robledo helped the foundered governor to his feet, and retired from sight.

Don Q. threw some twigs upon the fire, till its flames lit up the three faces. Then with an apology to the señorita, resumed his hat as she began to speak.

"So," she cried, "this false man has dared to say many things to prejudice me in your eyes? He would save himself by throwing the guilt upon me! —Oh, noble cabellero! Oh, chivalrous gentleman! I thank you!" She turned to spurn Majada.

"Oh, Rosita, Rosita!" moaned the Governor.

"I hate you! You have torn me from my home. You would force me to marry you!—Lord of the sierra!"—she turned to Don Q. with a magnificent movement—"what is such a traitor worthy of?"

"It is indeed a most shameful affair, señorita. Shall I punish him? Pray command me," replied the brigand with an air of respectful sympathy.

"No!—I will deal with him myself." Then springing to the side of Don Q. she added passionately: "Give me your knife, señor,—and I will show you how we Spanish women deal with such a one!"

Don Felipe cowered, his hands over his blanched face, as the chief handed the weapon to Rosita. She took it and faced Majada.

"Felipe," she said, with a sudden break into a caressing tone, "Felipe, look up and listen to me."

The Governor, struck by the change in her voice,

peered up at her, his hand only half withdrawn from his face.

"Felipe, you swore to marry me in seven days if—something happened. Is that not so?"

"If," repeated the man sulkily. "What's the good of talking of it now?"

"Because it is going to happen! Help me, Felipe, help me!"

Lithe as a wild creature, she flung herself round upon Don Q. as he spoke, stabbing viciously at him with the knife. The chief flung up his arms, and his dark cloak swirled about his head like the flapping of huge wings; but she pressed upon him, driving her knife deep as the folds of the cloak closed and settled in a heap upon Don Q.'s falling body. Nothing of him remained visible but one emaciated yellow hand, pale as death, grasping loosely at nothing.

Terrified by success, Rosita stood spell-bound, gazing at the motionless and shapeless heap of black clothing, under which lay the body of the famous brigand. At last she drew a long breath.

"I have won! I have defeated even Don Q.! There he lies, your unconquered thief, killed and out-manœuvred by a woman! You allowed my first plot to fail—I don't know how—but my second has mastered him."

But Majada only moaned.

"Yes; it is all very well. You have killed him, now they will kill us—those wolves of his," he whimpered.

"You coward! You thought all was lost before, but I would not yield! As soon as I saw the wretch's weakly body, his thin wrists, his pallor, the idea of this trick darted into my mind. I told

myself I could not fail! I have won in spite of his subtlety and power. Felipe, you will remain Governor, and I shall be your wife! Are you not happy now?"

But Majada made no response, he only gaped at her as she stood over him flushed and splendid in a storm of triumph. He had never been a brave man, and at that moment the probable vengeance of Don Q.'s followers drifted with a ghastly vividness before his mind's eye. Suddenly an odd expression crossed his face, his mouth fell open blankly, and, before she could comprehend what this meant, her wrists were seized from behind. She wrenched her hands towards her breast to free them, and looked back over her shoulder into the face of Don Q.!

"Help, help, Felipe!" this time the cry was an agonized appeal. But Majada stood heavily apart. He had no stomach for fighting, moreover he desired to consult his own safety, since Rosita by her act had confirmed his version of the plot. So he looked on with small interest while Rosita struggled like a gripped hawk, beak and talon. But to no purpose, for the wrists she had accounted strengthless were of steel.

A shrill whistle from the chief brought his men up. He charged them to strictly bind both prisoners.

"You have condemned yourself, señorita," Don Q. said. "Had I not been on my guard——" he stooped and raised his hat from the ground, the knife transfixed through crown and brim.

She shrugged her shoulders and laughed bitterly: "I had hoped it was your heart!"

"It would seem that you and Don Felipe have been partners in a conspiracy against my life," pursued the chief. "Down in the plains you permitted

yourselves to compass my death. I am able to inform you that the soldiers still wait for my coming in the gardens of Segli."

Doña Rosita's eyes flashed.

"I should have retrieved that disaster, if the blood running in this creature's veins were not milk," she pointed at Majada. "Now do as you like with us."

"What does Don Felipe deserve at my hands?" asked Don Q.

"Spare me, spare me!" cried Don Felipe, given over to fresh apprehensions.

Don Q. held up his hand for silence.

"You deserve to die." He paused. "But this lady loves you."

"No! He is a coward. I would kill him rather than marry him!" Rosita cried hotly.

"Lady, you have courage enough for two; thus, when you and this poltroon are made one, that will be no hindrance. To become his wife has been your desire. You deserve punishment as certainly as he."

"But I have heard you never hurt a woman," she protested.

"True. But when I can I give them their heart's desire, which occasionally serves my purpose equally well." He turned to Robledo. "Bring hither the good father."

"I will not submit! I will not be the wife of Don Felipe!" she exclaimed.

"Will you permit me to kill him instead?" inquired the chief sadly.

She turned away from her fellow-captive with a cold aloofness.

"I pray you to do so."

Don Q. considered her for a long moment.

"You have shared his guilt; you must, therefore, share his punishment," he said. "Choose, and remember, in choosing for him, you choose for yourself."

She met his eyes, a red spark seemed to glow under the drooping lids. The fiery spirit died within her. This terrible man was capable of anything. She shrank back with a gesture of compliance.

An hour later the couple were about to start for the lower passes. As they mounted Doña Rosita on a mule for her ride, Don Felipe approached the chief.

"You have forced me to marry a tigress!" he complained.

Don Q. was once more the amiable gentleman.

"But a beautiful tigress," he amended. "Pray accept my warm congratulations. I cannot answer for her qualities as a wife, but I am very sure the Señora Majada will make a very charming widow."

CHAPTER XIII

A KING OF FINANCE

AFTER this, time went on for a long period in the mountains as serenely as of old. The Executive had deprived Majada of his appointment, but otherwise the matter of dealing with Don Q. fell once more into abeyance.

Thus the usual series of captives continued to appear in the *Boca de Lobo,* but although most of them were satisfactory from a financial point of view, it chanced that not one presented any qualities of interest in the eyes of Don Q., until a certain Mr. George McCorkadale—whose fame was emblazoned in the Bourses of the two hemispheres—blundered into the wide-cast net of the robber-chief.

It was in the earlier days of motor travel, and no car had yet been seen in the region over which Don Q. held unofficial control. Now, the brigand was perhaps something of an anachronism, for he resented innovations. But it must be remembered that he followed a calling which demands the atmosphere of the Middle Ages: his feats sprang from an old-world soil. Besides, he had lived out his life in a land where the words "as it was, is now, and ever shall be" expresses very nearly the dominant rule of life.

Motor-cars, however, did not figure on Don Q.'s black list. He read of their costliness and their many breakdowns. Looked at with a professional eye, he felt they might prove good friends to a gentleman of his avocation should they ever be

used on the roads, few and unsurpassably bad, within the limits of his sphere of influence. He had, indeed, gone so far as to order that the appearance of a motor-car in any of the towns under the sierra was to be made the subject of a special and immediate report.

Thus it happened that during the very last of the few runs enjoyed by Mr. McCorkadale before his car crashed through a cactus hedge and into the morass beyond, he caught a glimpse of a peaked and pallid face, shadowed by a sombrero, which looked curiously at him from across the back of a restive mule, as his motor wheels carried him by in a storm of dust.

Before the mule had stopped kicking the car was already far away buzzing and jerking through a village street, where the women and children fled at sight of it to their doorways. Next it was bumping heavily down hill over a rudimentary road, which fact forced a warning from Mr. McCorkadale's companion.

"Look here, Wilson, my boy," shouted the millionaire through the tearing rush of wind, "I hired you as secretary, not general adviser. Hold tight!"

There was a concussion, a whirr, a choked clang. Wilson was shot out as from a catapult; then the car settled to its balance again, and plunged with a series of tremendous bucks into the valley.

The next thing McCorkadale remembered was being picked out of a clump of swamp grass by two uniformed figures in Napoleonic hats.

They supported him back into the lane, and asked to see his passport. It described him as an Englishman. He himself added the information (in fluent Spanish, but with a slight twang), that a

companion had been thrown from the car some distance back. While he spoke he drew a gold-mounted cigar-case out of his pocket, and lit a cigar with a match from a golden box hanging to his watch-chain.

Then he began to remount the hill, the two Civil Guards following, leading their horses.

"He is an Englishman," observed the younger doubtfully.

"It may be," replied the elder. "But I have not heard such Spanish in the mouths of the English nor from any in Spain. But when I was a conscript they sent me to Cuba—I heard it there."

McCorkadale came upon Wilson lying unconscious with sprawling limbs, just as the momentum of his fall had left him. Blood was oozing through the dust under his face. McCorkadale made no attempt to raise him, but gingerly used the pointed toe of his shoe to turn the young fellow's head. A long cut ran from cheek to eyebrow; the whole face was swollen and discoloured.

"*Madre de Dios!* but you have made a mess of your beauty, my boy," remarked his employer with a shrug of disgust. Then to the Civil Guards he added—"I am going to the *posada* in the village."

By the time the two men brought Wilson down to the little inn, they found McCorkadale seated before the big wood fire, eating hungrily of a savoury kid-stew, flavoured with sausage. The village barber, after examining the wounded man, shook his head, and a priest, journeying from a mountain village to Malaga, thereupon made a pitying remark.

McCorkadale glanced up with raised eyebrows.

"The young man has a thick skull. I have good

reason to know it," he said with indifference. "He will be recovered by to-morrow."

When he had finished eating the *patróna* took away the little table with its empty dishes. Most of those present then made a wide circle round the fire, and the talk became general. But McCorkadale sat silent and abstracted, having much to occupy his thoughts in those days.

Though a naturalized Englishman, he had been born and bred in Cuba. He early crossed to Brazil for larger facilities of trade; later New York and London knew him well. There was, in fact, nothing Scottish about him but his name and his extraordinary business instinct. He was one of the few who, starting well equipped in life with a large banking account and an excellent share in a profitable business, have refused to sink back upon the couch of ease offered to them by circumstances. Born rich, at twenty he was hard at work, and at five-and-thirty—the age at which he visited Spain—he had contrived to roll the ball of his fortunes through so much of the mud of the world's wealth that he was become one of the money-kings of the day.

Already inclined to fleshiness, and over-swarthy, he yet possessed in a pronounced degree the type of good looks characteristic of the Spanish colonies. It was commonly reported that he had never met his match at a bargain or as a prophet of the weather-changes of the financial world. But his most salient quality was said to be the capaciousness of his maw. Those who knew him best declared that, if he had gathered all the wealth of the universe into his pocket, with the exception of a single dollar note, he would know no rest until he

had somehow acquired that last dollar also. Under other conditions of life, or lacking some share of his preponderant cold greed, he could be conceived a gambler. In fact, he was a gambler, but with accurate knowledge, power, and pull on his side—a peril to his generation of the most modern kind.

Such was the man who in an interval, a lull in his electric career, chose to go motoring in Spain. He told one or two friends that he was feeling the strain of business, and then slipped quietly away to join his yacht at Vigo. As a matter of fact, he was in the position of a hunter who has set a snare and waits out of sight for his quarry to fall into it. He had engineered with skill and consummate completeness a corner in that human necessity, corn. Never before had he held so strong a hand in the destinies of the world. To be absent while his enormous transactions worked out to their appointed issue was a part of his scheme. He foresaw a possible amount of embarrassment when those most concerned saw his net closing over them. He resolved to go away for a holiday and leave time to play his hand for him. So, having forced even time to his own uses, he disappeared to await the moment when he must return for his final coup and victory.

As the night wore on a spoken name roused him from his moodiness. The talk had veered about to a subject that under the sierra possessed a perennial interest—the doings past or possible of Don Q.

"I have heard many stories of this fellow," McCorkadale joined in, with the half-contemptuous manner peculiar to him. "Tell me his last exploit."

The innkeeper, a thin, dark, wiry mountaineer, glanced furtively round at the men gathered in the room, and shook his head.

"There has been nothing for a long time, señor," he answered, though the memory was fresh in his mind of a fat and flabby high official with a new-made wife who, not so many months past, had fled discomfited past his door after a short sojourn with the *sequestrador* in the sierra.

The Cuban smiled unpleasantly.

"You have the nerves, *patrón*," he said. "You look as if you knew too much! Everyone warns me of the vulture of the sierra, yet you, who live under the shadow of his beak, know nothing of him."

"Not so, excellency," exclaimed the man. "The lord of the sierra dwells up there in truth"—he waved his hand towards the north—"but poor folk like ourselves speak little of him."

"I am curious to see him. I wish he would at this moment enter by your door!"

"The saints forbid, señor!" put in the priest. "You know not what you say. Without question you are a rich and a great man, but the lord of the sierra demands more than a ransom sometimes."

McCorkadale snapped his fingers.

"*Patrón*, you shall hire me a mule to-morrow, and I will ride into the mountains to look for Don Q."

"You must, then, buy the mule at its full price, excellency," replied the innkeeper sullenly, "for I am a poor man, and I shall never set eyes on it or you any more."

The Cuban laughed, yawned, stretching his arms over his head.

"Have no fear, *patrón;* I do not believe in your brigand. I have met some in my time a good deal more terrible. I will but ride back into Malaga."

As he spoke some one struck a guitar and began to sing. Verse by verse it flowed—a pathetic song of love and parting. Then another voice followed, in an altered rhythm, the singer improvising—as Spaniards commonly do—with a witty allusion to the stranger who, mistaking the *quebranta-huesos* for a parrot, would go up into the sierra to scratch its head.

A handsome young man, in the worn, leather accoutrements of a mountaineer, with a scarlet waistband, who had been dozing in a corner, an ancient fowling-piece propped between his knees, now woke up, and, seizing the guitar, chanted out a hunting-song in praise of the wild boar and the joys of bringing him to bay in some deep thicket under the mountain spurs.

The company was visibly stirred. Even Wilson opened his languid eyes.

"Any boars to be had hereabouts?" McCorkadale asked with interest.

A chorus answered him. Robledo, the singer, was himself a *cazador*—a hunter who had killed many boars. There were also roedeer and foxes up there in the gorges. But Robledo, in spite of the Cuban's brusque urging and offers of good payment, hung back at first, though, after some persuasion, he promised to arrange a hunt for his excellency.

Under cover of a surge of talk, the innkeeper brushed past the Cuban.

"Do not go, señor," he said in a low voice. "It is dangerous to hunt wild boars. If anything should happen to you it will give my inn a bad name."

But opposition was the salt of life to McCorkadale. His eyes gleamed.

"What is your good name to me?" he asked, with a laugh.

Thrim-thrim-thrim-thrim-thrim. The guitar twanged a dancing measure. Immediately there was the crisp, melodious rattle of castanets, the circle about the fire broke up, and in the clear space two couples were dancing, the girls swaying gracefully as meadow grasses, with many delicate steppings, swift and involved.

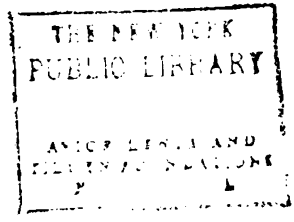
McCorkadale watched them, a glow coming slowly up into his face. Then he sprang to his feet, thrust aside one of the young men, and took his place as partner in the dance. There was a suppressed scuffle behind him as the *cazador's* sinewy wrist spoiled a knife-thrust aimed at the Cuban's back. The ousted partner, a young shepherd, turned in hot blood on the hunter.

"Be content, Estaban; my lord desires him," said Robledo soothingly.

In these dances partners advance and retreat, circle and bend, each moving in relation to the other, but separately, without contact even of the hands. McCorkadale took his part ably and with abandon, but as the music quickened he caught the girl by the waist and whirled her round in a rough waltz. He fancied he heard a growl from the spectators, but the dance hurried to an end and a black-browed man at once came up to tell him that the *cazador* had already departed to locate the quarry for his excellency's pleasure.

In the forenoon of the next day Wilson from his couch by the wall watched McCorkadale ride away towards the mountains with Robledo and one or two others. The innkeeper turned in from the doorway.

"Be content, Estaban; my lord desires him," said Robledo, softly.


THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

"He has a head of wood, your friend. No?" he said bitterly. "He will ruin my *posada*. When the *civiles* come to ask for him——" He opened his empty hands expressively.

"What do you mean?" asked Wilson. "The señor is well able to take care of himself."

"Yes, I have heard some talk of him. They say he has never met his match, that he has turned his hundreds into millions in England. Now he is about to turn the millions back into *pesetas* in Spain."

"Have no fear, for he is of a certainty a very great man of business," Wilson encouraged him.

The *patrón* gazed pensively at the sierra.

"He has gone where he may meet with a greater," he commented.

CHAPTER XIV

A KING OF FINANCE

"GEORGE MCCORKADALE, most entirely at your service," the gentleman of that name was saying as he swept his hat in an elaborate bow across his feet.

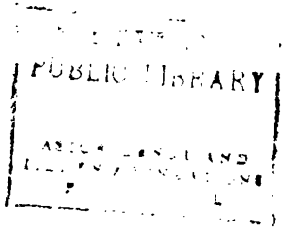
"McCorkadale," Don Q. repeated slowly, gazing at the swarthy face opposite, "and an Englishman? Yet that turn of the wrist was surely never learned beyond the sound of the Spanish tongue." He illustrated the supple movement as he spoke.

Don Q. was sunning himself on the rocky terrace outside his dwelling-cave. In front of him stood the recently-caught captive, smiling and jaunty, in these particulars varying to a marked degree from the generality of individuals who occupied that position.

The boar-hunt had resolved itself into a trap for the hunter. When McCorkadale arrived at the patch of level ground shut in by steep cliffs and feathered with brushwood—which he was assured was excellent ground for pig—the men had closed in about him. He grasped at the rifle slung behind his saddle, but his captors were too quick for him.

His first feeling was a murderous flare of rage. But Robledo and his companions knew how to handle furious men, and as the mule was led upwards through patches of pine and *pinsapo,* along tracks hardly to be detected, and, lastly, through barren, echoing ravines the Cuban cooled down to a more reasonable view of the situation. For an

His captors were too quick for him.


PUBLIC LIBRARY

idea germinated in his mind that a temporary seclusion in the glen of the brigand might very well answer the purpose for which he had left England.

True, some unpleasant stories of the remarkable doings of Don Q., told with appropriate gestures to heighten the effect, were common talk; and, moreover, most of them were tinctured with a blood-curdling strain of humour that to most ears sounded far from attractive, but the Cuban reminded himself that Don Q. was by profession a man with a price; and, in return for a few days' quiet, he felt he should not grudge a handsome sum. The experience of his life had convinced him that what money could not do was hardly worth taking into account.

Moreover, whatever his faults and failings, the prisoner did not lack courage of a hard and violent type, such as comes to a man who has found himself top dog in every struggle. The high-flown reporters of the West had loved to dwell on his "nerves of steel and brain of ice." McCorkadale recalled the words, and smiled. Felicitous words, he thought, which represented assets as valuable in the lonely sierra as among the perils of Wall Street. He proposed to have as good a time as possible, and though, when he left the languorous woods behind and climbed further and further into the shadows of bare black gorges, the desolation and intangible menace of the landscape communicated itself to his thoughts, he shook it off, and prepared to meet the dreaded chief with a cheerfulness he judged that personage would find unusual.

"Though English born, señor, I had the privilege to be brought up in your country." He supplemented the speech by another extravagant bow.

The chief's eyelids flickered. There was a suspicion of mockery in the man's courtesies.

"I have long been an exile from the world," he remarked with apparent irrelevance—"and there are many types of Englishmen."

McCorkadale looked sharply at him. The words might have conveyed an insult had the tone been less suave.

"Shall we touch on the disagreeable of business?" went on Don Q., urbanely. "The matter of your ransom, for example, señor?"

"Certainly. But pray let me assure you I am not a rich man. More's the pity!"

"It is indeed a pity, as I had thought of saying fifty thousand——"

"*Pesetas?*" interjected the prisoner airily.

"The señor is mistaken. I was about to say dollars; but, since he has had the bad taste to bargain, we will say pounds—fifty thousand English pounds sterling."

"You joke, surely? It is the ransom of a millionaire!" exclaimed McCorkadale.

Don Q. bent his head with a polite gesture of assent.

"Precisely. I perceive you do not understand that I am a man whom sordid considerations easily pain and offend. The question is now in abeyance. We will not return to it for a week. The petty details of business disgust me, as I have said; but finance on a grand scale—that is another affair. I have looked forward for some time to discussing the subject with so eminent an authority as yourself."

McCorkadale turned the dark red of a swarthy man.

"In spite of your exile, you seem to gather some news up here," he remarked, dropping his debonair manner.

"I flatter myself that it is so," agreed Don Q. with much amiability. "I count myself fortunate in meeting you. At one time or another members of various professions have honoured me here in the mountains—sportsmen, doctors, politicians, and so on; but never before a millionaire. They came to me in various ways—by rail, by carriage, on foot, and on horseback. But you, señor, outdid them all by rushing headlong into my domains in an automobile." The chief smiled, as though paying his companion a compliment.

The Cuban's face darkened with a scowl.

"I remember you by the wayside—you stood behind a mule."

"I am gratified. We should indeed have met sooner but for the *guardias civiles*. It was, luckily, but a pleasure deferred. I sent Robledo——"

"Ah, the scoundrel!" said McCorkadale reminiscently. Then, resuming his flippant manner: "You've got the better of me this trip. Well, I must communicate at once with my secretary. This ransom will take some time to collect,"—adding to himself, "but may I be skinned if ever you finger a penny of it!"

It was the evening of the second day. Don Q. and his guest were sitting within the cave over cigarettes and coffee. The conversation, touching on many points, lingered long on present-day financial methods. McCorkadale had explained the nature of "trusts" and "corners." He had gaily admitted that such combinations stifle legitimate trade, that companies to absorb any special line

could be engineered with the effect of starving small traders out of their lawful share of business. A description of the corner in corn was given, though its promoter modestly omitted to mention his interest in the operation.

Don Q. listened with attention.

"It would appear from much that you have been good enough to tell me, señor, that business is a cloak for many sores," he remarked.

McCorkadale showed his white teeth in a complacent grin.

"I suppose one must acknowledge so much. But what does it matter as long as the sore is on the back of another man?" he replied.

Don Q. eyed him broodingly.

"You may not be aware, señor, that I hold strong views on one's duty towards one's neighbour," he said.

"It goes without saying," laughed the Cuban; "but, I presume, stronger ones on one's duty to oneself?"

The chief raised a delicate yellow forefinger.

"Pardon me, I think not," he said with some grimness. "But it seems strange to me that I, who occasionally perform the meritorious action of relieving the rich of a part of their wealth, and thereby decreasing their temptations, am put outside the pale of the law, whereas these of whom you speak spend their lives in robbing the poor, and yet are respected and praised. How is this?"

"A matter of luck, I suppose," responded the other indifferently. "But there is something I want to talk over with you. Just reconsider the subject of my ransom—£50,000 is a long price."

Don Q. rose abruptly.

"At the end of the week, señor, when we have come to know one another better, we will speak of it again."

"But the delay is absurd!" exclaimed McCorkadale angrily. "I cannot permit it—I insist——"

Don Q. raised his hand.

"There are two courses open to you," he said slowly. "Either you remain as my guest, in which case I am sure you will respect my prejudices, or you will become the guest of my children in the valley, who will, I fear, not be likely to respect yours."

The Cuban set his jaw. It was intolerable!

"Call up your comrades, Gaspár, Robledo, and the rest, and settle the matter out of hand," he said insolently, losing hold on his temper; but the chief walked away into the interior of the cave without replying.

So the week passed, spent on the part of McCorkadale in fruitless efforts to force Don Q. to speak on the forbidden subject and in the development of a savage dislike towards him.

In equal measure the Cuban jarred upon Don Q. His banter, his obviously low opinion of the chief's intelligence, his flippant arrogance of speech and bearing—these and similar things awoke that resentment which slept always near the surface of the brigand's nature.

"He has, I fear," wrote Don Q. in his autobiography, "entirely misunderstood my character—or perhaps the standards by which he judges are in fault. He has four several times tried to compel me to speak of his ransom—on one occasion during dinner! And the sordid subject entirely robbed me of my appetite."

As a matter of fact, the Cuban, judging from the stand-point of the life he best knew, was misled by the chief's unfailing old-world courtesy. According to his creed such politeness under provocation meant fear. When you had the grip on your neighbour it was no longer necessary to be ceremonious with him. McCorkadale's long career of success had tended to blunt his perceptions. He had been an absolute monarch nearly all his life: thousands of work-people were his subjects. He boasted of possessing more direct power than the Tsar. His interests, indeed, were so vast that over the intricacies of them he could spend but little time. Yet he had been wont, now and then, to walk into one of his offices and pander to a despotic instinct that he owned by dismissing a score or two of workers for some reason almost fantastic.

Fifteen years of this existence had set their mark upon him. Had the present case been connected with the financial world he would certainly have studied the character of his opponent. He made the mistake of overlooking that of Don Q. He learned later that the chief's fragile aspect covered an immutable spirit, but he probably never arrived at the knowledge that this pale man who treated him so gently counted money as a small matter when compared with the violation of one of his foibles.

It was evident that detention in the mountains annoyed the Cuban out of all proportion to the hardships it entailed. Don Q. became curious, and at the end of the week he spoke,—

"It would seem, señor, that my hospitality does not meet with as much of your approval as I could wish."

"This has lasted long enough!" broke out the

other irritably. "Even your society and that of your *compañeros,* Gaspár & Co., down there"—he pointed a brown finger at the fires in the glade—"begins to pall after a while."

Don Q. sat silent for a moment, swallowing his wrath. This low-bred animal had, for the second time, dared to speak of the villainous Gaspár and his like as the "comrades" of their chief.

"I have been thinking much the same, señor." He spoke at last with a steady voice.

"That is well. If you let me go to-night I will pay you half as much again as the ransom you ask."

"You are in a hurry to descend the mountains. To-night, you suggest? Oh, no, señor, I grieve to disappoint you. This day month, shall we say?"

"Suppose we say this day week instead?" amended the prisoner. A notion struck him that he would play with Don Q.—play with his avaricious desires—fool him with a dream of wealth. "You remember our conversations on financial methods?"

The chief glanced at him for a moment, then lowered his eyes.

"Perfectly, señor."

In a few sentences McCorkadale explained the situation. He himself was the genius responsible for the famous corner in corn. He stood to gain something over two millions, provided he reached London in time.

Don Q. listened, nodding to emphasize the points. Although he did not speak a certain excitement was discernible about him.

"And if you do not arrive in London on the 21st?" he questioned.

"Of course, the whole scheme will fall through. It will mean ruin, in short."

"To you?" inquired the chief, with interest.

"*Caramba!* yes, to me. But we will not even allude to that most unlikely alternative. You, who are also a business man——" he began persuasively.

"Yes, yes," softly interjected Don Q., "we are both brigands. You are a brigand of the city, I of the mountains. I deprive the rich of their superfluity, you rob the poorest of their bread."

The Cuban arched his black eyebrows.

"These are details," he said, flicking the ash from his cigar.

"It is your intention to starve many thousands—poor women and little children—that you may grow richer—you who are rich already?" pursued Don Q. in a colourless tone.

McCorkadale stared him in the eyes.

"That is their business—or, at any rate, of their husbands and fathers."

"True, true," assented the chief, with the meekness of one convinced.

"I thought you would see it in my light, especially if I gave you my word that if you enable me to reach London in good time, I, on my part, will engage to make over to you 25 per cent. of any profits I may make on the deal."

"It is clear," commented the chief politely, "that my patron saint sent you into the sierra."

"Anyhow, it will be a record haul in the annals of brigandage."

"You must pardon me, señor, if I make one small amendment to your plan. I, of course, trust you; but we are, as you said, business men, and a certain sum in hand before you leave me, by way

of guarantee for the rest you have with so much of generosity promised, would be more satisfactory to my children down there in the valley. Suppose we name £100,000 as the sum to be placed in my hands by next Sunday. If you will have the goodness to write your instructions now the money may come in time for the 21st. You will pardon me."

"Well, it is uncommonly inconvenient," McCorkadale objected.

"What would you? My children must be satisfied. They do not comprehend the operations of high finance."

"Think again, Don Q. Surely there is no need to lift so much capital. Let the original sum stand."

"Pray do not force me to repent once again of a transaction between us. If you desire to bargain we can postpone the matter for another week. No? Then I will send you writing materials for your letter."

The chief passed into the cave, leaving McCorkadale upon the terrace.

At first the Cuban frowned at the opposite cliff, but pleasanter thoughts quickly followed, and suddenly he threw back his head and laughed aloud—a ringing neigh of laughter that woke the echoes.

Only one man in the valley below ventured to look up, and his mouth opened wide in an answering grin.

Don Q. had approached from behind with his usual noiseless step. He withdrew as quietly.

"The joyous spirits of my guest please our amiable Brancolo. It is good. We laugh each in our turn, we of the sierra," he said.

CHAPTER XV

A KING OF FINANCE

DURING his long—and, it must be admitted distinguished—career as a bandit, Don Q. became very rich. This was necessarily so, for his outgoings were small, and, on principles of policy, he levied an enormous percentage on the profits of the band. Unquestionably, greed of gold had no place in the chief's tortuous and contradictory character, but he knew men prize that for which they pay a large price. Furthermore, free supplies of money would have destroyed the cohesion of the pack of cut-throats he dragooned with so heavy a hand.

But, although it is a fact that Don Q. looked upon brigandage rather in the light of a fine art than as a means of gaining a livelihood, he was wisely careful of the treasure that had accrued to him. It would have surprised most people to know that he had large and carefully-distributed investments, not only in Spain, but all over Europe. For the general idea obtained that he kept his vast hoard hidden in some corner of the mysterious cave he occupied.

The existence of this treasure was a favourite topic of speculation all over Andalusia, and many an ambitious official, no less than the hungriest vagabond, visited that secret cache in his dreams. Amongst Don Q.'s own followers—those who had cause to best know and fear him—his treasure remained a golden desire—it could not be called a hope, at any rate, until McCorkadale, with his self-confident talk and smile of flashing eyes and teeth,

whispered away cold reason and still colder lessons of experience from the minds of Brancolo and two of his especial friends.

The Cuban had been quick to see from what direction danger most threatened the brigand. The efforts of the authorities to take him had never even approached to success; but how would it be if one raised a faction against him from among his own band—men who lived at perpetual close quarters with temptation, who were thoroughly familiar with the chief's goings out and comings in, and who hated him with the virulence of wild beasts kept under by the lash?

From the outset McCorkadale had tried to get into touch with Don Q.'s men, but failed until he happened upon Brancolo, the upshot of their stealthy conferences being a very neat plot to rid themselves of Don Q. and to acquire his treasure.

Brancolo was half Italian, half Spanish—a powerful, hairy fellow with a sleek, meaning smile. He had not been long in the sierra, and nothing short of necessity would have driven him there, for he was accustomed to a city life of easy infamy.

As the plot matured Brancolo persuaded a couple of intimates to join. The night for the attempt was fixed, and no suspicion seemed to have visited the chief. The Cuban was allowed to wander at will about the valley—even to linger till after darkness had fallen. A faint rasping noise rising nightly in the cave had so far eluded Don Q.'s usually vigilant ear, a fact which McCorkadale persistently brought forward as a proof that the brigand's best days were over.

On the appointed evening, after a friendly dinner and smoke enjoyed in the company of the chief,

McCorkadale withdrew to the particular recess in which he slept behind a cunningly contrived door. The accustomed routine was gone through. The chief followed him to turn down the bolt. It fell with its well-known click, and the Cuban in the darkness beyond it listened with a satisfied grin.

That night a change had taken place in the weather. The wind moaned through the swaying pines, squalls of rain drove across the valley, and when, a couple of hours after midnight, Brancolo met one of his allies at the foot of the pathway leading to the brigand's cave, a dense mountain mist filled the valley.

"What? Are you alone? Is it you, Barbon? Where, then, is Pedro?" asked the Italian.

"Have you not heard? The Old One sent him to Cantalera this evening," was the reply.

"What matters? There are still three of us."

Brancolo began to feel his way upwards, pushing his companion ahead of him. Weird noises of nighttime in the sierra seemed all about them, and they were scarcely sorry when they reached the opening of the cave.

A red light from the smouldering fire burned dully against the shroud of the mist. A death-like silence lay within.

From where the men stood one wall of the cave was dimly visible, but the fire and large area of the floor were hidden by a flange of rock that screened the entrance.

McCorkadale, for his part, lay long awake upon his bed of dry fern and grass, listening to the movements of the brigand. By and by began the soft pacing to and fro, a nightly habit of Don Q.'s, which always immediately preceded his going to rest.

But on this night it seemed to the watcher that he continued his walking much later than usual.

At length all was still except the moaning of the wind and the occasional sharp patter of a shower on the rock-face outside. To tell the truth, the Cuban was not in the least degree nervous, for it was well known that, save when the chief had a captive, he remained alone in the cave at night-time. Don Q.'s worn and fragile figure promised little resistance to the attack of four strong men—if, indeed, they ever reached the question of resistance—and McCorkadale fingered a loaded revolver he had adroitly stolen from among two or three the chief had been discussing with him that very morning.

By feeling the hands of his watch he knew that the hour was come. He crept from his bed. With infinite patience he drew in the wire that unshipped the bolt from its socket, then noiselessly pushed the door open and slipped out, stealing up the short passage to the main cave, and looked in. The fire had sunk to a heap of glowing ashes, but gave light enough to show Don Q. huddled in his cloak on a stool by the hearth.

McCorkadale stopped, breathless, with a curse in his heart, but plucked up spirit as he noticed the still, brooding, bird-like attitude that surely betokened sleep.

Perhaps, after all, luck was on his side. Don Q., for once, was caught napping, his head hunched between his shoulders. Instead of the danger of hunting him out of some hidden lair, how much easier now to——

He moved forward again until he came within sight of the mouth of the cave. Instantly two figures detached themselves from the gloom outside.

The moment had arrived. McCorkadale sprang swiftly behind Don Q., and fired three shots into his body.

The brigand swayed once, and, falling forward, settled limply, face downwards, on the rocky floor.

McCorkadale stood tense, one foot advanced, waiting to see a movement. But there was none—the heap of black draperies lay still. Yet the terror of the dead was upon him, for he started at the sound of a sigh behind him. He glanced back. At his shoulder stood Barbon, livid over the ragged tufts of his beard, his starting eyes fixed upon the chief's body.

McCorkadale pulled himself together.

"See, he is down at last! Did I not tell you? Where is his charmed life? Poof! Come, let us search for his hoard; there is no time to lose."

He ran forward, Barbon at his elbow. There was a strange grinding sound, a strangled shriek. He heard Barbon grunt out an oath as he pitched headlong into the glowing embers. The Cuban whirled round on his heels, and met a ray of light that played blindingly upon his eyes.

He could not see, but he fired wildly, and clubbing the pistol, rushed in upon the man with the lantern; but the light was snapped off, and, in the darkness, he dashed heavily against the wall.

He did not need to hear the familiar sibilant chuckle. Don Q.'s counter-trick was plain enough now.

For awhile he lay half-stunned, then a little burst of flame—Barbon's beard ablaze in the hot ashes—showed him the brigand standing over him. The Cuban dragged himself up into a sitting posture, with his back against the wall. He was utterly con-

founded and cowed, his early spurt of courage evaporated.

The chief opened the lantern, and looked him over, breaking into intermittent chuckles of harsh laughter.

"Mr. McCorkadale," he began, using the English form with a derisive inflection, "the song was not so far-fetched after all. You came into the sierra to scratch the parrot's head, and found the vulture."

The Cuban tried to turn his face from the pitiless light with a shudder.

"Corpse of a scullion! Am I grown sick, and deaf, and blind?" pursued the brigand. "Yet four to one against me! The chances were all on your side, fool!"

"No, for you have the luck of the devil," broke out the Cuban. "Pedro betrayed us. I did not see him."

"I assure you, you misjudged him—and, permit me to add, me also. He admitted a few details—reluctantly, believe me; but they did not add appreciably to the knowledge I had already of your little scheme. Pah! animal, get up and pull this carrion out of the fire."

McCorkadale, in spite of his name, came of a hybrid race that knows when it is beaten. He obeyed.

He bent over Barbon. The man had been stabbed in the back. One hand still clutched at the cloak of the dummy figure with which Don Q. deceived them.

Under the chief's directions McCorkadale worked frantically till he tossed the dead body into the valley below.

"Now, our good Brancolo—your chief friend. We must no forget him," said Don Q. in his softest

tones, as he turned his lantern on a shapeless, horrible something that lay by the opening of the cave. "You do not ask a question. Shall I tell you? He lingered so long fearing to cross my threshold that the doorsills caught and crushed him."

McCorkadale's shaking lips were blue.

"And Pedro?" he gasped.

Don Q. shrugged his shoulders.

"What do I know? Ask the vultures. Indeed, señor, I consider myself indebted to you"—he lit a cigarette as he spoke—"for you have given me an admirable opportunity to rid myself of some of the least desirable of my children."

By the time McCorkadale returned to the world the corner in corn had become past history. People spoke of it as an extraordinary *coup manqué*. Later, when they met with its promoter they began to believe in the legend of overstrained nerves he had so glibly circulated before he visited Spain. Moreover, rumour declared that the ruined millionaire had lavished enormous sums on religious institutions in that country, but this was an addition which those who best knew him refused to credit.

Yet it happened to be true: and this was how it came about.

"I fear, señor, you do not feel towards me the gratitude which I deserve at your hands," Don Q. observed, when the six weeks' imprisonment of his captive came to an end. "I have saved you from committing a monstrous crime."

"Crime?" echoed McCorkadale bitterly.

"I know of what you are thinking—of the night of our little adventure in the cave. Is it not so? You appear to forget that you would have killed

me had I not had the good fortune to be beforehand with you."

"You have my ransom; let me go," cried the Cuban desperately.

"Pardon me, señor; it is of that I would speak with you. I cannot soil my hands by taking a ransom of money gained as yours has been."

McCorkadale turned a terrified look upon him. Fate had forced him to learn in those latter days some of the things he had aforetime taught to others.

"You have nothing to fear," resumed Don Q.; "I am a man of honour. You have bought your freedom; and, though I cannot myself accept the price of it, I must fulfil my part of the bargain in giving you your liberty. I will deduct a small amount for distribution among my children, and afterwards I venture to hope that by bestowing the remainder on hospitals and sisterhoods that aid the poor we may purge it from the curse it carries."

CHAPTER XVI

HOW M. BLUFORT PAINTED FOR HIS RIGHT HAND

For a considerable time Don Q. was occupied in dividing McCorkadale's unwilling charities among the various institutions founded for the help of the very poor. Hospitals were enriched, also many religious houses, where the sisters nursed the sick, cared for the aged, for orphans, or devoted themselves to the education of the young. A conspicuously large donation went north to a Castilian convent, of which the Mother Superior was said throughout the district to be already a saint, who spent herself in efforts to lighten the heavy burdens of the poor.

While yet he busied himself with these matters, Don Q. had the good fortune to secure an English prisoner, a tall spare man, who drifted up into the *Boca de Lobo,* or rather was carried there by the current of events that in the sierra sucked most travellers into the vortex of the brigand's power.

It would be difficult to convey the mental attitude of Sir Graham Marks, when he discovered that his captor was immersed in anxious endeavours to distribute for the advantage of the poor and needy, certain monies which he held to be too ill-gotten for his own personal use.

On an evening some few weeks later, Don Q. had risen from the table, set out on the terrace, to fetch from his secret cellar another bottle of his choicest vintage, which gave proof enough that the captive

of the moment, seated opposite to him, was one who held a high place in his good graces.

The sun, falling almost visibly down the blue arches of the sky, was throwing a thousand reflections upon the eternal snows of the Sierra Nevada, towards which the Englishman's gaze was turned.

He held a half-empty glass of wine in his hand, an excellent cigarette glowed between his lips, and he was thinking that he, at least, could look back to his detention by the notable *sequestrador,* Don Q., with satisfaction. It must already have become amply clear to readers that the character of a prisoner made all the difference in the treatment he was likely to receive from the brigand. He happened to like Sir Graham Marks, and Sir Graham, if he could not be said absolutely to admire Don Q.—whose savageries somewhat cooled such a feeling—acknowledged to a certain profound respect for many aspects of the chief's character.

Don Q. counted himself lucky in the acquisition of a prisoner of the type of Sir Graham; he loved to talk with him, and so keep in touch, more or less, with the world he had abjured. For Sir Graham was a Briton of the adaptable sort, a lord of many acres, a very genial gentleman behind a surface of reserve, and between him and his captor had sprung up one of those queer likings which the bandit possessed the quality of inspiring.

It was to this fact that Sir Graham owed the reasonable figure at which his ransom had been set, and while he waited for its arrival, he found the brigand very good company. "A rare man," he said of him afterwards, "when amiable, an A1 companion; when not, better absent."

Don Q. returned with the bottle that he had carefully opened, and, seating himself at the table, resumed the conversation at the point where he had left it.

"I am aware it is said that the Pyrennean ibex are finer beasts than those to be found in our mountains. But this is a mistake. Your itinerant sportsman," he bowed with a courteous smile to his guest, "spends a month or two after his quarry, he goes where the *cazadores* take him, he finds only what he is meant to find, he sees but what it is arranged he shall see. You have not yet shot in the mountains of Castille, but wherever you go, you will never bring down a finer head than that of yesterday with its 32-inch horns. We of the mountains know where to lead our guests."

Sir Graham laughed.

"Thanks," he said, "I am quite sure I shall never again enjoy the royal sport you have given me, señor. And I should like to add how grateful I feel for the goodwill on your part, which put me in the way of so much luck with my rifle."

"'To serve a friend, one sheds one's blood,'" quoted the brigand, raising his glass to clink against that of the Englishman.

An extreme sentiment has always the effect of embarrassing one of Sir Graham's race. He turned the subject rather awkwardly.

"By the way, I had amongst my luggage when I came up here, some magazines and some odd monthly parts of the *World's Best Pictures*. One of them contains a rather striking reproduction of a painting of ibex in the sierra. I think it might interest you."

Don Q. held up his hand.

"Pray be seated. Your books shall be brought to you."

He hissed sharply, and a man ran up from the valley in answer.

For some weeks these publications had lain unopened in the cave of Don Q. and the Englishman noticed with some surprise the eagerness with which the brigand now turned the pages, and also the acumen and point of the remarks he made. But it was clear that the portraits interested him the most.

"The features of great generals, administrators, and others who hold the power of swaying the fortunes of the world," he remarked, "have for all time been reproduced for the satisfaction of the peoples at large. It was so in the days of Rameses, it is so now. How is it then that the aspect of so widely known a personage as myself has never been placed upon canvas?"

Sir Graham sipped his wine meditatively.

"May I venture to suggest that no artist of—at any rate sufficiently high reputation, has up to the present had an opportunity of studying you," he answered with gravity.

"True," said the chief, "the fault is after all my own," and he returned to his examination of the pictures. "My attention," he added presently, "has been arrested by these two portraits, both of which are signed by Alcibiade Blufort. Both are excellent pieces of work."

Sir Graham bent over to look at them.

"Well, I suppose Blufort's name is second to none in Europe as a portrait painter," he remarked. "This picture of Tommy Hughes in his tent—I've seen the original—is first class."

"And who, señor, is Tommy Hughes?" inquired

Don Q. in his suavest manner. "Pardon my ignorance, but remember I live out of the world and rarely see an English newspaper unless, indeed, I am so fortunate as to capture one of your race."

"By Jove, it's quite refreshing to meet some one who does *not* know Tommy!" exclaimed Sir Graham. "He has travelled a bit, and fought a bit, and laid down the law for three nations during quite a long time, and upheld his opinions in interviews carried on in every language under the sun. Oh, Tommy wasn't born dumb, I can tell you!"

Don Q. stared at his companion. The last sentence completely baffled him.

"A happy coincidence," he murmured.

Sir Graham suppressed a laugh.

"That portrait was bought in by the English nation," he added.

"Indeed? That is very interesting. In fact, it settles the point." Don Q. paused. "Señor, do you think this French artist, Blufort, would paint my portrait?"

It was the Englishman's turn to be staggered.

"Yes, señor," the chief repeated with firmness, "my portrait. It will be no small honour even to Señor Blufort to place upon canvas the features of him, who, after Napoleon, is the greatest brigand the world has ever known."

Sir Graham bowed from his side of the table with cordiality.

"Unquestionably," he said.

"Posterity," resumed the chief, "will value it, for posterity will apprise me at my true worth. I grieve at times, señor, when I reflect how very false an idea of me may go down to future generations. But my autobiography, which I have carefully

written, will give them the real facts of my career, and tell them of one or two of my exploits, which—if I am not mistaken—will live. I have noticed that biographies of great men are always prefaced by a portrait, reproduced from the work of some great artist. Mine must not be an exception. Besides," continued Don Q., becoming almost genial, "I will admit that I should not be adverse to my portrait being bought by the English nation, among whom I may say I have many friends."

"By Jove, yes!" agreed Sir Graham, looking across at the strange face and figure of the chief, "by Jove, yes! It is a real loss to the world that no adequate representation of you can ever be given to the thousands who have heard of and wondered at your famous career."

"But why should not a great portrait of me reach the world that wonders at me?" demanded Don Q. sharply. "Do you not think it possible that Señor Blufort can be persuaded to pay me a visit in the sierra to place upon his immortal canvas the likeness of one whose name, I can, without being misunderstood by you, declare to be worthy because equally immortal?"

Seeing that the chief waited for his answer, Sir Graham replied diplomatically,—

"I imagine he would think twice before coming."

"The fee need be no obstacle," urged Don Q. "I believe that artists vied with each other for the honour of portraying Napoleon."

"Still—your reputation," hesitated the Englishman."

"I have certainly been much maligned," admitted the chief. "There are many narrow-minded people in the plains. But genius, señor, genius such

as this Frenchman's, would not—in my opinion—be deterred by foolish gossip from seizing upon the chance of securing so unparalleled a subject for his art to expend itself upon."

"Very likely you are right," said the other.

"Besides, Señor Blufort happens at this moment to be at Malaga. He is studying details of Spanish life for his next great picture. I shall invite him to visit me. He will not refuse, I feel sure."

This was growing serious, for Sir Graham could not imagine how a true likeness of the brigand could by any possibility please that fastidious, but high-tempered personage. And if it did not please him, what would happen to Monsieur Blufort?

"There is a Madame Blufort, who might perhaps feel some natural anxiety——" he began.

"The whims of women have never influenced me, señor, I assure you," replied Don Q. "I have made up my mind that Señor Blufort shall paint me. Can you tell me what the British nation paid him for this picture of Don Tommy?"

"Two thousand guineas, I believe," said Sir Graham, naming a big sum at a venture.

"Good. I shall offer him three thousand. I will write at once and perhaps you, señor, will be good enough to add a postscript to say what you think of my hospitality?"

Sir Graham hesitated once more. Then he spoke firmly.

"You know how grateful I am for all the kindness you have shown me," he said. "Your hospitality leaves nothing to be desired. I do not know when I have enjoyed myself so much. But if I were to write as you wish, I should in a manner be pledging myself that you would send Blufort

back to his wife safe and sound. If you can give me your word as to that, I shall be delighted to add to your note."

A frown crossed the pallid forehead of the chief, but faded again.

"True," he said, "you have reason. For I can by no means warrant this gentleman's safe return to the plains. Suppose I do not like the character of his work? Suppose I am not pleased? What then?"

"Precisely, what then?" echoed Sir Graham dryly.

"Ah, as to that," Don Q. shrugged his pointed shoulders, "who can say?" He bowed over his glass of black coffee. "I perceive your difficulty, señor. I will with your permission, however, send my invitation at once."

"You can but ask him," responded Sir Graham, relieved.

Don Q. turned abruptly.

"Do you mean he would be so unwise as to refuse?"

"Not if he knew you."

Don Q. bowed once more.

"I trust, señor, for his own sake, he will not dream of doing so.

The upshot of this conversation was that Don Q. wrote a charming letter to the great French portrait painter. He praised his work, praised it in such words as to show that he was something of a connoisseur. He went on to say that a great artist needed a great subject. He instanced portraits of Napoleon and others. He pointed out that Monsieur Blufort's chance had come out to meet him, and he rejoiced that he, Don Q., should be the in-

dividual to afford to supreme genius a supreme opportunity. He ended with polite assurances of hospitality, and the pleasure with which he looked forward to making the acquaintance of the painter.

Days went by during which Don Q. always spoke of the coming of Blufort as certain. Sir Graham was lucky in that the chief liked him, and he has since said he seldom enjoyed any period of his life more than that he spent in the sierra while awaiting the arrival of his ransom. For Don Q. sent him ibex shooting under parole and with Robledo, whose knowledge of the haunts and the habits of the wild *cabra montes* was exhaustive. These expeditions resulted in half-a-dozen good and one remarkable head.

It was at the end of such a day's sport that Sir Graham returned to find the demeanour of Don Q. unaccountably altered. He was no longer the courteous and charming companion, the perfect host.

All that was changed. Don Q. sat silent, brooding, with a vicious gleam in his eyes if he raised them; he was in fact plunged in one of those black fits of depression to which his followers had grown accustomed. His prisoner, being a man of the world, wisely accepted the position and held his tongue also. For the black fit of Don Q. always closed his lips, and he often at such times remained ten days without speaking. If he spoke some one suffered.

For three days the Englishman, living the round with which he had become familiar, entered the cave to find the brigand always crouched over his fire, always in the same position, staring into the flames with the same fierce vacant eyes, and bitter

compressed lips. He seemed not to stir through the hours.

There was nothing for it but to wait for the dark ice of the mood to break up. And Sir Graham was almost startled as he sat reading opposite the brooding figure on the night of the third day, when Don Q. broke his sixty hours' silence.

"Don Graham, I am about to ask your advice," he said suddenly.

The other murmured his gratification.

"I have received a letter from Monsieur Blufort."

The Englishman nodded.

"You will remember that I wrote to him a very courteous invitation, offering him the honour of painting my portrait."

"I remember perfectly."

"You told me he was a gentleman," went on the chief accusingly.

"I believe he is considered to be one."

"His reply," said Don Q. with a sibilant inflection in his voice that his companion had never noticed before, "would lead me to a directly contrary conclusion."

"He has offended you?"

"Deeply, I may say, mortally! Listen! He declines my invitation and adds that he has heard they take excellent photographs in the prisons of Spain!"

The malignant fury of the words, Sir Graham has since declared, almost cowed him. He answered something, he does not know what.

"Is it possible," said Don Q. at last in a more even tone, "that he has never heard of me before coming to Spain—or has some garbled account of my career reached him from persons in power?"

The Englishman agreed that something of the kind was likely.

"It is his misfortune," said Don Q.

"That he cannot paint your portrait?"

"Not at all. That he did not take my offer to paint it on his own terms," amended the chief.

"What do you mean?"

"That he must now do so on mine."

"But he is in Malaga—how can you?"

"My friend, there are no 'buts' in such a career as mine," Don Q. assured him.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW M. BLUFORT PAINTED FOR HIS RIGHT HAND

As a rule artists are among the most charming of men. Very possibly Monsieur Blufort had once belonged to this category; but an easily attained success, together with the ministrations and flatteries of an adoring wife had, it must be confessed, tended to spoil him. He was a heavy, pale-faced fellow, with moist hair lying back from a splendid brow; he took carpingly the favours fortune heaped upon him, and held an insolent, hectoring aspect towards the world that for its own purposes had become the sycophant of his genius.

For, unpleasant a person as Blufort made himself, nothing could mar the gift of genius that had been bestowed upon him. Too many paragraphs in the Press had probably given him a false idea of his own value. He could not realize that if one night his soul were required of him, the sun would rise and set upon the morrow and his absence make no particular difference to any one except Madame Blufort, and the paragraph writers, whose duty it would be to praise or blame him and his works until the dust closed over his head.

So it came about that when Blufort, living luxuriously in the best hotel at Malaga, received the courteous invitation of Don Q., the humour of the situation was quite lost upon him, and instead of an amused, or possibly, gratified man, he became a very angry one. He railed at the brigand's effrontery, he ridiculed his vanity, he spoke altogether in a

way that would have surprised Don Q. had he heard him.

"Never mind, my friend," said his wife soothingly, "it shows how world-wide is the reputation of my Alcibiade."

"But you do not recognize it as an outrage," Blufort shouted, "a buffet in the face! This thief considers it would honour me to paint his vile image! I will answer him!"

Whereupon Monsieur Blufort, grinding his teeth, sat down and wrote the words that were to earn for him so extraordinary an aftermath.

A few days passed before matters matured to the point of permitting Don Q. to take a further step. The result was a transaction described variously by the artist as a "foul disgrace," and by Don Q. as a "simple little affair not inadequately carried out."

On a glorious morning Monsieur and Madame Blufort started to spend the day near the ruined tower of Camala. Monsieur intended to make some sketches, and madame had ordered a couple of his favourite dishes for the *déjeuner* they carried with them.

For fifteen hundred years Camala, set on its cone-like hill, has watched the sun rise and set over the edges of a wide landscape that looks across the blue waters of the Mediterranean to the mountains of Africa. Monsieur had forgotten his grievance against the *sequestrador,* and was feeding in the solemn silence of an habitually ill-tempered man. Madame rejoiced in the blessed peace of the moment. The shadow of the old tower lay cool across their heads, a string of cranes floated far away over the marshes near the sea, the driver seated on the floor of the carriage ate black bread and garlic with the

help of a murderous-looking clasp knife. To tell the truth Blufort's capture was almost ludicrous in its simplicity. All of a sudden he was aware of a handsome fellow in a costume, the picturesqueness of which almost hid its rags, who was repeating some fierce sentence in the rough dialect of the hills.

The artist raised his face from the plate to reply, when he perceived a couple of the same type behind Madame. His next sensation was of two huge hairy hands under his elbows lifting him to his feet. He turned resentfully, but the unshaven black-muzzled face that snarled back at him drove the words from his lips. The first speaker, who, in fact, was no other than Robledo, spoke again more slowly.

"My lord places himself at the feet of the señor, and desires his presence in the sierra."

"Who is your lord?" demanded Blufort arrogantly.

"He is known as Don Q. Surely the señor has heard of him? He has sent a mule for the señor to ride."

"I have written to your master that I cannot come," replied Blufort, wriggling in Gaspár's big hands. "And you can go and tell him I will not come!"

Robledo uttered some rapid words to his comrades. "Our lord said we were to be gentle unless he refused. We have been very gentle," he said regretfully, "and he has refused. Therefore, Gaspár, give him your knee in the small of his fat back while I entangle his legs. So——"

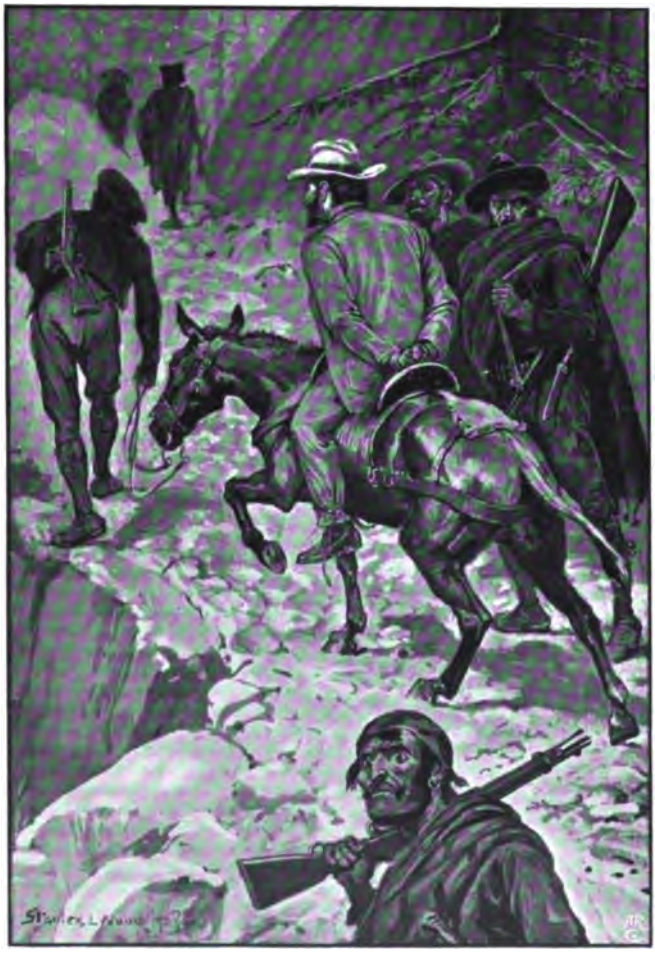
Before the prolonged syllable ceased, Blufort was bound and being carried away. Madame had just regained her breath and was preparing to scream when the handsome robber approached her.

"Señora," he said, doffing his hat, "my lord bade me tell you that if you raise an alarm in Malaga, and set your consul and the *guardias civiles* to look for the señor, you will never again behold him. But if you wait bravely and patiently, he may, perhaps, be returned to you in due time," he turned away, but a thought seemed to strike him. "Señora," he added coming back, "be assured that, as my lord says, so it shall be. Therefore, take heed."

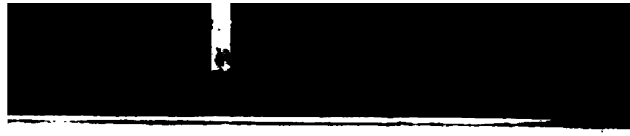
The wonderful day was waning by the time Blufort and his captors traversed the lower ravines of the sierra. The gaunt brown mountain peaks, the pink fog of the southern sunset, the hardy green of the woods, would, at any other time, have appealed to the artist in the Frenchman. But not now. His mind was too busy recalling all the dreadful tales he had heard of the brigand, nor could he get out of his head the terms of the letter he had, with rather hasty arrogance, addressed to the mysterious and terrible personage he was now about to face.

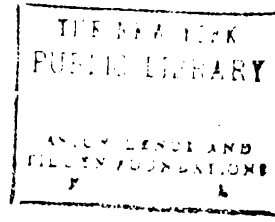
He reflected with groans that his action had been premature, he should have waited until he was safe out of Spain before giving this tiger the rebuff he had so richly earned. He wished himself back in that charming little retreat on the banks of the Garonne, or secure within the walls of his studio in Paris, anywhere in fact but here, tied on an ambling mule, and surrounded by half-a-dozen dirty but determined brigands, and travelling hour by hour deeper and deeper into the gloom of the sierra and towards the presence of the man he had insulted.

Every now and then he would break into speech; he warned his captors that his government would make them and their master pay dearly for his de-



He wished himself anywhere but here, tied on an ambling mule, and surrounded by half-a-dozen dirty but determined brigands.




PUBLIC LIBRARY

ion, aye, and more, for an angry world would e to wipe such insects out of existence. These . many other threats he held over them. Later he offered bribes and pardon to the six trudging ares, he implored them to think of his wife's ony, he was ready to make any promise if they uld but turn and convey him safely back to alaga.

But the men made no reply save to whip up the ule to a faster progress. In effect, Monsieur ufort was inclined to think he was suffering from bad dream, for no word could he wring from his cort.

Fury, a sense of helplessness, and finally alarm lled him. But by the time he had been led through choing rock passages with his handkerchief tied ver his eyes, and emerged into a pine-fringed val- ey cut off from all the world, it must be admitted that fear had gained complete possession of his soul. He and his captors had rested for a few hours on the road, so that the morning sun was already visible over the cliffs when he was conducted up to the cave of Don Q.

As it happened he saw on the terrace only a tall lean man lounging in a chair and giving directions in execrable Spanish about a skin that had been pegged out to dry.

Frightened as he was, Blufort resolved to take up a definite stand before the brigand of the sierra. Acting upon this idea he advanced slowly and assuming an attitude he said with solemnity—

"Are you aware, señor, that in capturing me you have committed a crime against not civilization only, but against Art, sacred Art herself?"

At the sound of his voice the tall man turned and looked at him.

"By George, yes!" he said, with an air of compunction.

"The man devoted to Art is all compact of nerves," went on Blufort in a tone of reproach. "Why, then, have you permitted mine to be shattered by this capture? From your letter I am inclined to think you know something of Art. Do you not then recognize how deeply you have wronged her in my person? How irretrievably you have injured humanity by rudely snatching me from my work in a moment of inspiration?"

"I am sure Don Q. will greatly regret putting you to any inconvenience," Sir Graham said politely.

"Then you are not that horrible robber?"

"I should not speak in such terms of him if I were you," put in the other, "for his profession and the particular standing he has reached in it happen to be points on which our—host feels strongly."

"Who are you then?"

"My name is Marks—and I am, like you, a captive—only I am about to leave and you have but just come."

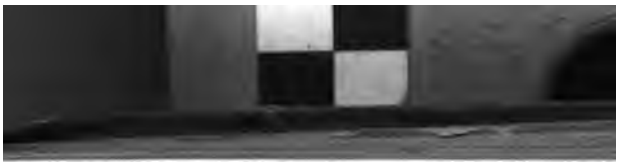
"How—how does that ruffian treat one?" whispered the painter.

"As one gentleman treats another," replied Sir Graham. "I've had a ripping good time, and that's the truth."

The painter stared. "Impossible!" he breathed. "Monsieur Marks, do you know who I am?"

"I can make a guess. You are Monsieur Blufort, the great artist."

"Monsieur," said the Frenchman, his voice as-



suming a rumbling tremolo of excitement, "this Don Q., this thief, will live to regret to-day!"

"Hush—or so may you!" Sir Graham shook his head. "There he is in the valley. Good-bye. He is beckoning to me. I assure you, monsieur, you will find our friend a very decent fellow if you treat him civilly."

A very hearty farewell took place between his departing captive and the chief, who then advanced slowly up the curving path to meet Blufort.

"I am pleased to have the opportunity of entertaining so eminent a personage as Señor Blufort," he began, bowing courteously.

"We will not waste time in foolish speeches," returned the painter, whose spirit had risen after his conversation with the Englishman. "If you are wise you will release me directly and allow me to accompany that gentleman to the plains."

Don Q. spread out his palms.

"I am desolated to refuse," he said urbanely.

"Refuse? You cannot—you dare not refuse!"

Don Q.'s strange eyes flickered under their drooping lids.

"And why not, may I inquire?"

"Because my government, France herself——"

"Ah, now we come to business," interrupted the chief with a slight gesture. "No doubt they prize you. Tell me, señor, how much do you suppose France will pay to regain you?"

"But——" Blufort began with some bluster.

The brigand held up his thin hand.

"There are no 'buts.' If France will regain you, she must give me my price. It is not a large one considering it represents your value," said Don Q. "Five thousand guineas in English money. Sir

Graham has taught me the beauty of English guineas. If I should fail to return you, I will not accept the ransom."

"Fail to return me——?" cried the horrified painter. "What then is your purpose?"

"Hear me, señor." Don Q. took his place in the lounge chair. "I wrote you a letter in which I made you a certain offer. I asked you to paint my portrait on your own terms. Your reply was an insult."

"I—I was annoyed," stammered the other, as the chief waited for an answer.

"I grieve to acknowledge that I was inclined to be annoyed also," said Don Q. "But, naturally, nothing could alter my decision. You are here now to paint my portrait on my terms. Do you desire to hear them?"

"They do not affect me," said Blufort sullenly.

"You are rash in saying that. For you will remain in the sierra until your task is finished."

"I shall be rescued. I have no fear."

"Señor, you are very afraid indeed," responded Don Q. with a chilly laugh. "And rightly so. People will tell you I have dwelt here in my eyrie from time immemorial; that is a legend; and never yet has a prisoner been taken from my hands; that is an historic truth. With all the intelligence, all the art, all the genius at your command, you are about to paint me, Don Q., the *sequestrador* of the sierra. I have been told that four weeks have sufficed for the production of some of your finest creations. May I ask if this is so?"

"It is sufficient."

"Then you shall have four weeks in which to place my presentment on your canvas."

"I have with me nothing but my little travelling paintbox," objected Blufort.

"Pardon, I should not dream of asking you to transcend all your former efforts, could I not offer you the choice materials to which you are accustomed. Everything has been brought here from your hotel at Malaga."

"I am sure I am much indebted to you." Blufort was angry, baffled. "You appear to be thoroughly proficient in your—calling."

"But naturally, since I am at the head of my profession." The Chief paused before continuing—"There are heights to which you have not yet climbed in yours."

"I have painted the most notable persons of the day."

"Permit me to remind you that you have not yet painted me!" said the bandit and then, after a pause, went on—"Once I should have paid you a handsome fee for your efforts in my behalf, now, we must reverse the process, alas! At the close of the four weeks, on the twenty-eighth day, if I do not find your picture to my liking, do you know what will happen?"

"You will order me to repaint it." Blufort could not withhold the insolent triumph from his voice, for here at least he held Don Q. in his power.

"Not at all."

"What then?"

"I shall cut off your right hand," said the chief.

The Frenchman turned colour, his heart sank in horror. There was a light in the fierce flickering eyes, a tone in the sibilant voice that convinced him the brigand was most absolutely in earnest.

After this conversation Don Q. withdrew into the

cave, and, a few minutes later, men came labouring up the steep path, burdened with easels, canvases, and all the other paraphernalia belonging to Blufort.

He sat among them, sick at heart, dumfounded, resentful. "They did not tell us the half about this terrible man," he reflected. "He is the most remorseless creature in the Peninsula!"

But Don Q.'s purposes never lingered hang-footed. After the mid-day meal, of which he partook in the company of the artist, the chief intimated that he was ready to give Blufort his first sitting.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW M. BLUFORT PAINTED FOR HIS RIGHT HAND

As the days passed and Blufort found his work advancing, his hopes rose. He was a consummate master of his art, that he knew. The idea of failure, always remote, ceased to enter into his calculations. He determined to paint such a picture of the brigand as would bring tears of gratitude to the eyes of the original. He would elevate the harshness, soften away that dreadful resemblance to the *quebranta-huesos,* the bone-breaking vulture. "Yes," thought Blufort, "I will paint him as he conceives himself to be!"

He begged Don Q. to be good enough not to look at the portrait until it was completed.

"No, señor, you may rely upon my word that I shall not look upon your work until it is finished," the brigand replied. "Then I will accord to it the praise or blame it deserves."

The words damped for a moment the ardour and complacency of the great painter. Blame? No one had dared to apply such a word to one of his canvases for a decade!

"My art has never failed me," he said after a moment. "It will not now. And my biographers will narrate how Blufort painted for something more precious than life!"

"I am glad to find, señor, that you are undertaking your task in so praiseworthy a spirit," remarked Don Q. dryly.

The chief was a good sitter, and, moreover, a

brilliant conversationalist, so that it is but truth to say the artist found the time passing far more pleasantly than he could have anticipated. Besides, as the high features of Don Q. grew out on the canvas against a background of wild sierra and snow, Blufort's confidence increased, his fears grew more and more remote, until it might be said they had vanished altogether. Meantime he worked hard at his task.

He was interested, it may be added almost amused, by the drama in which he was taking part. He fancied he read Don Q. to the depths, or it would be more accurate to say, according to the painter's estimate, throughout the shallows of his being. The Frenchman looked forward to the moment when he might say—"See! Are you not satisfied?" Three weeks had elapsed and a day or two later the picture was nearing completion. Blufort, in the current of talk, said so to the chief.

"And where shall it hang, señor?" he asked. "Your cave——"

Don Q. held up his hand, moving its delicate fingers to and fro.

"No, no, señor. I understand that the French nation purchases your works. I assure you I have no objection to placing it in your national gallery, though had my own country been rich enough to acquire it, I confess I should have preferred my portrait to remain enshrined in the land where I was born and shall one day die."

Blufort, apparently much taken up with his brush, made no reply.

"It is pleasant," Don Q. went on, "when one has lived so exceptional a life as mine, to imagine unborn generations pausing in front of my portrait,

and discussing some one or other of the exploits which have given me my reputation."

Work in the morning, siesta in the afternoon, dinner at sunset, when the fires of the sun were quenched behind the peaks, and long chill shadows fell athwart the mountains, and the wind that always rises when the warmth of day has gone, moaned and rustled through the fir-trees above the valley. This was the routine of life with the brigand.

In the evenings the little table in the cave was spread with the best, and wine circulated and warmed the frozen heart and blood of the fragile host. Then he would uplift his sibilant voice and sing softly the songs he loved, of old heroes and their dead loves, and of Spain struggling to be free. For the brigand was an ardent patriot.

Blufort once remarked upon this, with a half hint of wonder why Don Q. did not stand by the government of his country instead of in opposition.

"Because most forms of government are bad and corrupt," replied the chief serenely. "I hold rule over a large region; I administer strict justice, which the law cannot do, since I know the true particulars of each case, and the executive relies on witnesses more or less prejudiced if not perjured. Truth up here is undiluted and pure as our own springs; down in the plains it has grown foul and corrupted. In me you behold, in fine, the triumph of individual government as contrasted with co-operative government."

"To make individual government a success, one must find the adequate man," observed the painter, with the manner of one who is paying a compliment.

"Ah, true," returned the chief, accepting it without elation as his due.

That night after dinner the artist went to his easel and gazed long at the picture he had painted. He was already gathering neat phrases in his memory, with which to reproduce for the amazement of the world the episode in his career that was drawing to a close. He had well gauged his man! He laughed secretly but with intense enjoyment over his own power of discernment. How clearly he had read the character of his captor, and what a delicious little history it made!

In the morning Blufort added a touch or two, then turning to Don Q. he said,—

"Will you look upon my work, señor? The portrait is at last perfect!" And he said it with a glow of warm assurance as to its effect on the original.

"With pleasure, señor!" Don Q. rose from his seat and advanced to the easel.

For several minutes he stood silently before the picture, examining it in various lights. The painter watched, flattering himself, "none other could have done as I have done—and maintained the likeness."

After a long inspection the chief turned slowly to his companion.

"This is terribly sad," he said in a gentle, regretful voice, but with a marked sibilance of intonation, "terribly sad! And just as I was beginning to have something of a liking for you, señor."

Blufort started back.

"Do you mean to say——" he stammered and stopped, breathless, for there was a significance in the look fixed upon him.

"Señor," resumed the chief, "you are a very great artist? Your reputation is wide as the world?"

Blufort bowed with a beating heart.

"Yet even craftsmen as skilful as yourself have their occasional failures."

"Assuredly. But this is not one," said the Frenchman huskily and with an effort.

"Bring a looking-glass," commanded the chief.

A man hurriedly fetched one. The brigand pushed him into position beside the picture, and placed himself so that his reflection in the mirror appeared close beside Blufort's presentment of him.

"Look," he said briefly.

And truly the portrait was a wonderful piece of work. By his consummate art Blufort had, while preserving the likeness, transmuted the cruel vulture aspect into that of an ascetic. The soul that gazed out at you from the pictured eyes, was a soul, high, pure, intense, but not the soul of Don Q. The disparity between the mirrored face and the pictured one was flagrant.

The artist looked and turned away shivering. How for a moment had he believed it possible to hoodwink this *quebranta-huesos,* this creature, that not content with the flesh of its victims, plunged its beak into the marrow of their bones?

"Have you anything to say, señor?" demanded Don Q. "If I had a brother at the Vatican—this might be he! But I am not a Pope. I am not the head of Christendom but of *sequestradores.* What have you to say?"

The ominous voice ceased. Blufort stood silent though mentally he called himself a thrice-condemned fool. For not ten minutes before he had looked forward with complacence to an easy victory by reason of Don Q.'s vanity.

"I told you that if you failed to please me in the

matter," went on the chief with the same menacing urbanity, "you should lose your hand. But then I never expected this!" he pointed at the picture.

Blufort looked at him. Always two natures were struggling for mastery in the heart of Don Q. At that moment if ever the darker of the two held the upper hand.

"No?" questioned the painter feebly.

"No! I had allowed for the possibility of failure, for which I set the forfeit of your right hand. But I had not conceived the possibility of an insult."

"I have done all that could be done with a subject such as yourself!" exclaimed the artist in desperation.

"Pardon, señor. With even so unpromising a subject as myself, your brush could have been true."

"But you will release me?"

"Yes, you shall indeed be released. My men will bury you at sunset. For the present I will leave you alone with your picture in order that you may realize the full enormity of your offence."

Blufort sat for a long time absolutely stunned. When next he looked round with understanding the sun stood high in the zenith. He was alone on the terrace still. The robbers were going about their business in the valley below, and Don Q. was nowhere to be seen. Blufort felt the blow of the chief's rejection of the portrait the more, because he had been so certain of success. In imagination he had seen himself that very afternoon travelling down the mountains, free, and thinking out racy terms in which to relate his story to sympathetic admirers in the plains—in Paris. He had, in fancy, read the paragraph headed, "How M. Blufort painted for his right hand!"

"And so I have painted!" he cried to himself, shaking his hand up at the sky, "painted consummately, as not another in this generation could paint!" he sprang forward and stood before the picture. "See, how I have purged the horrors from his countenance, yet it is the same face! And this horrible deformed thief of the hills, this inhuman creature pretends dissatisfaction! Yes, pretends, for the fulfilment of his own purposes of cruelty—from the blackness of his heart! And when I am dead, they will sell this picture, and this devil will go down to the ages idealized into a saint by *my* hand!"

He stared at the pictured face, high-souled, ascetic, noble. The look, the expression, maddened him. This man, this Don Q., had cheated him! He was to die, he, the great Blufort, alone and horribly among these desolate mountains.

"My men shall bury you at sunset." The words echoed in the painter's ears. He clasped his head in his arms and panted for revenge. But he was helpless—helpless! Then an idea struck him. He was condemned to die. Even these demons could do no more, could do no worse to him. He groped with hurried fingers for his palette and brushes. Yes, yes, Don Q. should learn that Blufort, the prisoner, the dying man, could still sting! Swiftly he set to work upon the portrait again. Swiftly he painted, painted as perhaps he had never painted before, for he painted with a gall of madness in his blood.

Under the artist's touch the face upon the easel quickly changed, all the flattery went out of it, and in its stead there grew out minute by minute Don Q. in his blackest mood, with the vulture physiognomy,

the bitter, sneering jaw, a face hardly of this human world, as Blufort's heart told him.

At length it was done. Blufort flung down his brushes and waited. He laughed shrilly. He threw himself into a chair.

When at last the footfall of the brigand sounded upon the inner flooring of the cave, Blufort felt his first pang of repentance. Perhaps what he had been doing would but add to the rigours of his death. It was too late to think of that now, for Don Q. advanced slowly from the mouth of the cavern and his glance turned at once to the picture.

He fell back a step in his surprise. Then he drew nearer, and for many minutes stood motionless staring at the altered likeness of himself.

Blufort watched him furtively, till Don Q. with flashing eyes swung round upon him.

"What—what have you done, señor?" he cried.

Blufort scowled. "You did not like the ideal, I have given you the real!" he snarled. "Yes, señor, that is you—you—you! Kill me now as soon as you like."

"Kill?" repeated Don Q., with a strange modulation in his voice. "Kill a man who can paint such a picture as that, so true, so forceful? Destroy art without a parallel such as yours? Impossible!"

"Do not torment me!"

"I tell you I feel myself looking out at myself from those eyes, my spirit lies breathing upon those lips," the chief said with his strange enthusiasm. "The fire from the altar before the gods has come down upon you. Here is genius. Live, señor; I could not be guilty of depriving the world of you.

Come, we will dine, and drink to the health of such an artist!"

"And afterwards?" asked Blufort, bewildered by the turn of events.

"Afterwards my men shall escort you in safety to the foothills."

"And the picture——"

"As to the picture, it is worthy of its subject. I need say no more in its praise. Señor, I shall never sit to another painter!"

CHAPTER XIX

HOW DON Q. PAID FOR HIS CIGARETTES

In due course Monsieur Alcibiade Blufort was returned without injury to his anxious wife. Very shortly the couple left Malaga for Madrid, where they happened to make acquaintance with a certain General Ubrique, to whom the artist recounted the story of his capture and release with a graphic power that left the personality of the great brigand strongly impressed upon the mind of the hearer, whose mental comment on the affair took much the form of the old proverb, " One must seize the nettle if one would avoid its sting." Ubrique looked down at his own dark nervous hand, and regretted that matters of greater moment stood in the way of testing its firmness of grasp upon the yet unhandled nettle of the sierra. Nothing seemed less likely than that Fate should ever set him face to face with the brigand, yet as it turned out the chance he had idly desired lay waiting for him in the near future.

Now among the many contradictory attributes of the great brigand chief, one stood out in prominence. Far and wide it was known that Don Q. was a staunch friend. There is no manner of doubt that this quality not only shed a lustre on his name, but it secured to him the love of all who served him in the mountains or the towns, and was a significant factor in the success of his career.

The man or woman who carried his orders, the individual who executed them, and the third who brought back the result in news or otherwise to the

chief, each held but a loose end of the varied designs of their master, and could in any case have betrayed him only to a limited extent; but all relied equally on that staunch and mysterious friend, who never forsook the poorest of them in their need. Don Q. was credited with grudging nothing—money, trouble, or personal danger—to help those who had served him faithfully.

Moreover, no "Cæsar's wife" that ever breathed valued her reputation more highly than did the famous robber in his fastnesses of the sierra. He was sedulous to preserve it in every point, as enemy or friend, inexorable alike in kindness or in cruelty.

Not so very long after the meeting of the French painter and General Ubrique in Madrid, the bandit one morning found his store of tobacco was running low, and forthwith dispatched Robledo into the plains to procure a fresh stock.

It was rare for Don Q. to leave the *Boca de Lobo;* he mostly remained there directing the movements of his people from the depths of his cave. But from time to time when the weather was warm, he would emerge to visit his outposts, or, taking his rifle, climb into little known recesses of the mountains to hunt the ibex.

From such an expedition he was returning on a brilliant morning in the last days of March, and had halted for the noonday heat in a cave that overhung a forest of cork trees. No reflection of the sunshine entered his mood, which was one of the blackest. For no less than three days had elapsed since he had run out of material for cigarettes, and almost six since he had sent Robledo down to the plains to bring him the necessary supply.

Don Q. sat, therefore, and stared vindictively at

the fire, which was always kindled to warm his chilly blood, even when winter had loosed its grip on the bleak heights.

The sun was about to set gorgeously in the silence of the sierra when a robber came to the door of the cave, and crossed himself as he saw the attitude of his chief. He waited for the usual command of Don Q.

"Speak, Gaspár." Don Q. scarcely turned his head.

The big, lowering rascal was about to reply, when from outside came a patter of light feet, and the next moment a tall, panting girl stood in the mouth of the cave. The men who had been running after to detain her paused on the threshold.

"I will see my lord of the mountains! Señor, let me speak with you alone," she cried. "These tried to prevent me——"

Don Q. let his eyes rest upon his visitor. She felt his gaze rather than saw it, for his hat was drawn over his brow, and he sat in the shadows beyond the fire. She was dressed after the picturesque fashion of the Spanish lower class. Her glossy black hair, beautifully dressed, was bare, and her dark, fierce, troubled face was flushed by her breathless flight up the slope. She stood under the scrutiny, obviously frightened, but ready nevertheless to dare all to gain a hearing.

Don Q. motioned with his hand.

"Sit down," he said, indicating a rough chair which had been contrived from a barrel. Then, turning to his followers, "You will retire," he added; "but, first, what does your brawling mean? Am I to be disturbed in this fashion?"

"The orders," replied Gaspár in a low voice,

" were that my lord would not be troubled until the return of Robledo. This woman——"

" Go," snarled the chief, " the señorita would see me alone."

The men filed hurriedly out of sight, and Don Q., with his head sunk between his shoulders, waited till the last footstep died away.

But the silence was too much for the ruffled nerves of his visitor.

" You have never seen me before," she burst out. " You do not know who I am."

" Go on, dear Isabelilla."

She started violently. " You know me?"

" I fear I know nearly everything," replied Don Q., with an air of regretting an awkward circumstance. " I know, for instance, that when I send Robledo on special errands to the plains, he nearly always wastes an hour or two for which he does not account—with a guitar, Isabelilla."

At the mention of the name of Robledo the girl's eyes filled with tears.

" He will never sing under my window any more," she sobbed.

" This is exceedingly sad news," remarked Don Q. coldly. " I beg you to tell me the whole story—the true story, Isabelilla."

" Oh, my lord, do not be angry," she pleaded. " Four days ago Robledo came into the town, charged with a mission from my lord. When it was growing dark he went out upon that mission, and presently, in the dark, he returned?"

" With his guitar?" questioned the chief serenely.

" In order to avert suspicion," Isabelilla protested.

" Pray proceed. It is not for you to give me

reasons. Give me facts very simply. I will do the rest."

"He was singing—oh! a sweet song," went on the girl, in a broken voice, "when there was a sound of men running down the street. His music ceased, and he swung himself up into the embrasure of the window, where it was very dark. The men stopped and searched the shadows under my window, and one said—'He was here but a moment ago, when I warned you'—for no one dreamed he was in the window above, clinging to the bars. 'What is to be done?' they said; and one who seemed the leader, answered—'We will remain here without noise in the shadows, for of a surety this man whom we have seen this evening in the company of smugglers and thieves, will come presently with the tobacco he received to see this woman,' and he added words, my lord, that should not be spoken of a woman"—she paused, for she was crying very bitterly.

"Ah!" commented Don Q. "And after?"

"Robledo heard the words, and they hurt his heart, for he loves me. He dropped from the window on the man's shoulders, even before he had finished speaking—and Robledo had a knife in his hand. 'Ah!' he cried, 'thou insect, thou street-beetle, thou wilt not speak again thus of such a woman!'"

"So the fellow died who maligned you? No?"

"I have heard so, lord. He lay upon the ground, and I saw Robledo run very swiftly up the street, and there were five yelping at his heels. They were out of sight in a moment. And doubtless Robledo would have escaped, for he is the bravest and the swiftest of all men; but they chased him into the

arms of a patrol who were stationed at the end of the street near the *plaza*. He wounded two, but there were ten against him. What would you?"

"So he permitted himself to be made a prisoner?" The chief's thin smile pointed his comment bitterly.

"Yes; for there were many," Isabelilla deprecated; then resumed, in much agitation—"Next day my mother made inquiries at the prison, after her wont. None suspect her. And they say he will be taken out to the Alameda on Sunday morning and garotted. When I heard this, I borrowed a mule, and hastened up into the sierra, though I was greatly afraid."

"If you were afraid, why did you come into the mountains?" The question, put with an assumption of cold astonishment, took the girl aback visibly.

"To tell my lord," she stammered.

"But what have I to do with the matter?"

"My lord will deliver Robledo. My lord never deserts his people," she said proudly.

"Was it while upon my business that Robledo was captured? Had it been so, doubtless I should have released him."

"But—but—oh, my lord, you cannot mean you will let him die?"

"I am afraid, dear Isabelilla, that you have fathomed my meaning," said Don Q. with indifference. "It would be subversive of the discipline which I maintain among my men were I to release Robledo, who was taken prisoner while disobeying my commands."

"But he loves me," she urged.

"That also I did not command him to do."

Isabelilla stared at Don Q. She could not believe her ears. That the chief, upon whom all her world

relied, should forsake Robledo and leave him to his fate was absolutely unbelievable. In her misery she stepped nearer to him, but she could see no sign of relenting in his fierce eyes or upon the sinister lips.

"But Robledo is the most faithful of all my lord's followers," she cried. "In prison he is waiting the aid of my lord. Shall he expect in vain?"

There was still no answer. Carried beyond herself with the sorrow of the moment, she turned on him.

"They will say in the plains that the arm of my lord of the sierra is grown short, seeing it cannot stretch far enough to pluck the most worthy and brave of his men from death."

"They will not say that," replied the brigand gently.

"Why not?"

"Because, my good Isabelilla, I shall take care to avenge Robledo—when he is dead."

The girl looked at him in horror. Then she burst out,—

"Since I could walk," she stormed, "I have been —I, too—in the service of my lord. Who sent the news to the mountains that Don Luis was coming, carrying poison in his hat? It was I! Who did her part when my lord came down into the city by night to enter the palace of Don Felipe Majada? It was I! But why do I talk in vain? My lord knows. They say he cannot forget! But that is not true. He has altered, and can forget us now! Then listen, my lord, to Isabelilla. You have changed her from a friend into a foe. She will go down the mountains, and not smile again until she has done the thing that is in her mind. But she

will laugh when she sees the lord of the sierra garotted on the Alameda, even as Robledo."

As she turned to go she flung a packet upon the ground at the chief's feet.

"Stop!" At sound of the masterful word the girl halted involuntarily.

"What is this?"

"Robledo, even in the prison, did not forget his lord," she returned furiously. "He bade me fetch this and send it by a sure hand to"—she faced him and met his glance—"my lord. For his sake I brought it, not——" she ended abruptly.

"So Robledo sent me this?" said Don Q. thoughtfully. "Pardon me, Isabelilla." He opened the packet and fingered and smelt the tobacco it contained. "It is good. Know then, girl, that my lack of cigarettes has been a very harrowing trial to me. You will take a message from me to Robledo?"

"Yes, lord."

"You will say that, as Robledo was so criminal as to waste his time under your window instead of coming straight back to me, I am determined to leave him to die."

"Ah," she wailed, striking her hands together in despair.

"And you will add that, as he had the good sense, even when he was lying under sentence of death, to remember the horrible privation I was undergoing without cigarettes, I have, for that reason, and that alone, changed my intention, and resolved to forgive him, and take him out of prison on Saturday."

Isabelilla sprang to Don Q.'s side, and covered his slender, bony hand with kisses.

"That will do," said the chief, withdrawing his

fingers from hers. "Go; lose no time, or Robledo will begin to fear that I intend to punish him according to his deserts."

"Lord, he sent also this"—she drew forth another packet. "It is a plan of the prison of Castelleno."

"I do not suppose it will be necessary for me to consult it," the chief said, with a strange smile of remembrance, "but leave it here. It was wise to send it."

"And these newspapers," added the girl, with a sly, pleased glance. "Robledo did not forget these either."

Then she departed, radiant and full of joy, praying incoherent blessings from all the saints on the head of Don Q.

CHAPTER XX

HOW DON Q. PAID FOR HIS CIGARETTES

BUT we must now turn aside to visit Robledo in his prison. The young brigand had been lodged in a damp cell, lit by a single grating, beneath which the slow waters of a historic river rolled. Intimation had somehow been conveyed to him of his chief's promise to save him, but, although the short period of life granted by the law was drawing towards a close, no sign of the rescue he relied on had yet become visible to cheer him.

It is hard to say how far the authorities were aware of Robledo's real career—whether they regarded him as merely one of the many smugglers on the seaboard, or whether some whisper of his connection with Don Q. had leaked out. However that may be, extraordinary measures were taken to safeguard the prisoner.

He had been placed in that particular dungeon because it was hoped that his friends, learning of his presence there, might be tempted to essay a rescue by water. Thus by night, while Robledo watched star after star swim across the field of his vision through the little grating, and while he listened sadly enough to the voice of the river as it sang softly on its way to the sea, a score of soldiers manned the dark parapet above his head with their Mauser rifles lying ready beside them.

No precaution was taken but it quickly reached the ears of the prisoner in the damp dungeon below watermark. And by him each was telegraphed, by

means of coloured rags tied to the bars of the grating, to certain eyes outside whose vigilance never relaxed. Thus Don Q. was kept intimately informed of the elaborate arrangements made by the prison authorities.

Meanwhile, depression seized upon Robledo. Not that he doubted his chief's power to help him, but time hung heavy on his hands; escape became daily more difficult. Besides, he was scarcely thirty years old; a hunter and sleeper under the sky; and he loved. He spent the nights in restless listening; occasionally he murmured a prayer to the Mother of Heaven, or his mind went back over the incidents of his hot, fierce life. Visions of Isabelilla, with her adorable smile, and yet more adorable moments of gravity when she swore she loved him, lighted the young robber's cell, but, departing, left him only in deeper gloom.

Far away in the sierra Don Q. had been almost as dejected as his follower. In the good old times, when he lived in comparative amity with the Executive, the plan of rescue would have been designed more or less on the lines of a dash into the plains with half-a-dozen of his followers, a suborned gaoler, and horses waiting outside the white walls of the city.

But life was growing more complicated with every passing year. Don Q. recognized the fact, and it roused his venom. It cannot be denied that he found a keen edge of pleasure in hearing of the added precautions taken against Robledo's escape, and, indeed, it presently became evident that he must be prepared with some counter-plan of unusual ingenuity if he hoped to bring off the fulfilment of his promise.

It showed most vividly the extraordinary influence the chief possessed over the minds of his followers, spies, dependents, and retainers, that from the moment he promised his assistance to her lover in delivering him from prison, Isabelilla regarded Robledo as—to all practical intent—a free man again. And, indeed, it must be repeated here, that, had circumstances forced him, there was no project too wild or too charged with danger but the chief would have attempted it rather than have failed those who trusted in him.

He pondered a very long time over the news sent up by unshaven messengers from the city. As the affair grew in difficulty, so much the more he felt himself pledged by pride and honour to carry it through in a manner worthy of himself. Many designs suggested themselves to his subtle mind, but each one was rejected in turn. In fact, Friday's sunset was already blurring under the sweep of the rising darkness while Don Q. yet sat brooding in his cave.

He had by this time returned to the *Boca de Lobo* and was sitting in his accustomed place with his lamp beside him and the papers sent by the thoughtful Robledo hanging across his knee. Something he read arrested his attention. He reperused it carefully, then, letting the sheet fall, he sat staring into the fire in his hunched birdlike attitude, absently rolling cigarettes with deft, fragile fingers. Long-sleeping memories had evidently been awakened in his brain, for he sighed once or twice, as does a man who half regrets a vanished decade.

We have altogether failed in our portraiture of the great brigand if the reader does not by this time understand the dominant quality of freakish humour,

compounded of lust of action, incredible vanity and fantastic courage, which led Don Q. into the chiefest of his exploits. Although, perhaps, he valued Robledo more than any other of his followers, he was quite capable of allowing him to die for a small disobedience, as he regarded the most trifling deviation from orders as a studied insult.

Whimsical and often extravagant in his rewards as in his punishments, the idea of Robledo lying under sentence of death, yet sending up into the mountains material for cigarettes, instead of an appeal for release, had, it must be admitted, gratified the chief immeasurably.

"The fellow realizes rightly enough that his life is a small matter compared with the vexatious fact of my lack of cigarettes," he had murmured to himself more than once during the last four days.

But for the moment, while Don Q. sat with the newspaper hanging idly on his knee, Robledo and the affairs of the present had faded before a vivid memory rising from the days long past.

Suddenly, as was his wont, his intelligence seemed to spring back as with a leap to the pressing necessity of the hour. He looked down at the paragraph again; his sinister laughter broke out as he struck his hand upon his knee with the air of a man who had found what he sought.

But Don Q. never acted on the spur of a thought if he could spare time for reflection. Thus cigarette after cigarette burnt itself out in a flare between his thin lips before he called Ramon, Gaspár, and Felipe up from the fires in the valley.

"Gaspár," he began, "you know the inn at Colaro, on the road to Castelleno?"

"Yes, lord."

"Proceed there, and order an excellent supper for ten o'clock to-morrow night."

"Yes, lord."

"Go. You, Felipe, will proceed to the Castillo Negro below the mountains, and see there Valentina, who waits upon the maid of the Duquesa. You know her?"

The young man reddened, and glanced up with a furtive look of fear.

"Yes, lord."

The chief met his eyes with a contemptuous smile.

"Are my eyelids closed that I cannot see Felipito, the debonair, dancing, it may be, miles away? What of that?" he asked, in icy tones. "Do I not hear the foolish words that drop into Valentina's ear from an amorous mouth?"

The robber crossed himself, but made no reply.

"Nevertheless, go down and bring the girl to the grove of ilex near to Colaro. She shall say that her grandmother is dying. The grandmother who brought her up, you understand? She need fear nothing. She has pleased me." He added some further instructions.

"And you, Ramon, pick with care ten of the least repulsive looking of your comrades, saddle my mule, and wait for me at the head of the pass."

The brigands trooped off, and the chief dropped his eyes once more upon the paragraph that had given him inspiration.

It merely stated that high festivities were to be held in Castelleno on the evening of Saturday, and that the ball would be graced by the presence of the Duquesa d'Orava, who happened to be staying at her country house, the Castillo Negro, some twelve miles distant from the town. It was situated,

in fact, upon the upper reaches of that river that murmured so dismally below the prison grating behind which Robledo was lying.

Beneath the sierra, which rose stark and threatening in the moonlight, ran the narrow country road connecting the Castillo Negro with the highway. Down this road the carriage of the old Duquesa must pass as she drove from her house to the ball to be given that night in the city, but the deep dust remained undisturbed in the windings of the lane as late as seven o'clock on the Saturday evening.

At that hour a band of men led by a muffled figure on a mule appeared suddenly on the outskirts of a grove of ilex trees that cast a deep shadow on the lane before its junction with the main road. Their coming was as silent as the growth of a picture under a painter's hand. Five minutes later, as soon as their leader had satisfied himself that no carriage wheels had recently passed that way, the whole party melted as silently into the thick tree shadows.

For two hours nothing happened, the country seemed to lie empty under the moon. Then an outrider with a red band round his hat came galloping from the direction of the Castillo Negro. Immediately behind him a carriage drove at full speed, with two other outriders pounding in the track of its swaying bulk, for the scars of traffic on the little road were seldom tended.

Perhaps the world held no more surprised woman than the old Duquesa d'Orava when her carriage pulled up with a jerk in the shade of the ilex grove. Perhaps, also, she was frightened; but she was a high-tempered old lady, and she showed no symptom of fear as she called out her strident commands to the coachman to go on.

Report says she was adding some full-flavoured remarks when the door opened and a man in a cloak stood bowing before her, his pallid face and bald head gleaming white in the dusk.

At the sight of him the Duquesa's elderly maid began to scream.

"Peace, fool! One slits the throat of a screaming hen." The sharp, sibilant tones cut across the woman's shrieks. "May I beg of you, Duquesa, to order this person to descend? I must speak with you alone."

"Certainly not! I am in a hurry. Drive on, Joaquin!"

"Pardon me," said the figure at the door, and before the occupants of the carriage had any idea of his intention, he laid a grip of steel on the maid's arm, and swung her adroitly out into the hands of a man behind him. The Duquesa was conscious of a little hustling about the horses, then a silence, which was broken by the muffled figure who had remained standing beside the carriage step.

"It grieves me to the heart to put you to this inconvenience, illustrissima, but for the sake of performing a humane action, one would venture to plead for your forgiveness."

The old lady listened amazed. This robber had the accent, the bearing of her own class. Oddly enough, the fact further incensed her.

"What does this mean," she cried fiercely. "Who are you? A footpad?"

"Hardly, Duquesa. Your eyes deceive you in this dimness. Believe me, no man has a more profound horror of footpads than myself. To the honourable brigand the footpad is unspeakably abhorrent."

Perhaps the fiery old heart sank at this, but a laugh cackled on the night air.

"A very courtly ruffian," she said insolently. "What is your name?"

"I have for many years past been known as Don Q.," he answered ceremoniously.

The Duquesa d'Orava fell silent. The great chief had cut his name deep into the consciousness of his generation.

"You are the *sequestrador?*" she said at last.

"Such is the calling I have the honour to follow."

"I have heard that you have never held a lady to ransom."

"Ah! you gratify me. It is quite true."

"Then, what is it you want of me?"

"I come to beg a favour."

"Tell me quickly what it is, for I am late, and must proceed."

"I am desolated; but to proceed—that is impossible."

"What do you mean? I am, then, your prisoner?" she asked brusquely.

"By no means. Only my guest for twelve hours in a charming valley, where I have made ready for so distinguished a visitor. In the meantime I will ask you to be so good as to lend me your carriage."

"Most assuredly I shall do nothing of the kind!" She brought her palms sharply together to emphasize the refusal.

"It will save a life!"

"Pooh! The life of some baseborn outlaw such as yourself? No, I say! To-night I accept the hospitality of the Santolallas. They *fête* our great General Ubrique—Don Ermelo Ubrique."

"Do not fear to accept mine, illustrissima." Don

Q.'s courtesy remained unruffled. "My birth is infinitely more noble than that of Santolalla."

He was about to move away as men in the livery of the Duquesa emerged from among the trees and took the places of her servants. The sinking moon was beginning to shine upon the road under the ilex trees, and the Duquesa's haughty old face peered out keenly.

"These are not my people," she said with imperious finality. "I demand my own servants and to be allowed to continue my journey to Castelleno."

Don Q. turned back.

"That is impossible, my dear lady. Within limits my men are quite at your service. They are not, believe me, as villainous as their looks would seem to indicate. To-morrow morning your own servants and your carriage will be returned to you."

The gauge of the Duquesa's temper had by this time run up to high pressure.

"I will not submit to this insolence! Who are you that you should put your commands upon me?" she demanded. "How dare you pretend to noble birth? A valet in his master's coat would cut a better figure!"

The chief stood before her silent.

"I order you to let me go! I shall have you whipped in the streets of Malaga, thief!" and with the word a withered hand shot out into the moonbeams, but Don Q., with a slight movement, avoided the fan meant to strike violently across his face.

He was aware of his men's eyes upon him. He bent forward almost into the carriage and spoke to the Duquesa.

"Emilia"—the sudden whisper froze her—"do you forget two blows given long ago—first the fan,

then the knife—and whose arms were round you after?"

The wind sobbed in the trees; the mysterious night noises made themselves heard; while the Duquesa d'Orava sat stiffly upright without word or sign. How had this man, this brigand, learned the secret of her tragic girlhood?—and spoken in a voice she seemed to remember!

Don Q. softly closed the door, and waved his hand to the coachman; then, as the wheels rumbled away into the distance, he stepped into the shadows, and once more the little road lay empty under the waning moon.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW DON Q. PAID FOR HIS CIGARETTES

It was midnight before the carriage drew up a second time by the ilex grove. The night was cold with a wind from the distant sea, and the gorgeously-attired dame who stood waiting by the roadside said much harshly under her breath of the folly of women. Ten minutes earlier she had been examining herself in a mirror under the roof of a poor *choza* hidden in the heart of the wood. A pretty girl hovered about her, adding anxious finishing touches to the old lady's toilette.

Presently a thin yellow hand glittering with jewels was held up.

"Enough, my child. I am satisfied with your work. You will have your reward in good time," said Don Q., who, under the skilful fingers of Valentina, had assumed more or less the aspect of the Duquesa d'Orava.

"I have done all I can, lord," stammered the girl, "but the light of a ball-room, it is brilliant—too much for——"

"I do not mean to tempt it. Now, arrange upon my shoulders that horrible garment with feathers placed upon its edges to torture the wearer. I really no longer wonder at the violent moods of women."

The presence of the Duquesa d'Orava at the splendid entertainment given by the Santolallas was regarded as second only in importance to that of the great general himself. After midnight her non-

appearance began to breed comment. For, although she rarely missed a ball, she as rarely stayed at the Castillo Negro, spending most of her time in Madrid and at other resorts where people of her world congregated according to the season of the year.

The small hours had begun to chime when the coach of the Duquesa entered Castelleno, galloped past the bull-ring, through the Alameda, and swept under the gateway into the Santolallas's ancient *patio,* where a hundred lamps scarcely lit up the massive architecture.

The plan designed by the chief was one eminently suited to his temperament. Having made up his mind that an attempt to release Robledo by any of the ordinary methods would, under the circumstances, have been merely to court disaster, and, as a consequence, loss of reputation, Don Q.'s fantastic intelligence, fired by the chance paragraph in the paper, lit upon a scheme so original, so grotesque, and fraught with so much of personal danger as to be entirely after his own heart.

It must be owned that the question of whether Robledo lived or died had been relegated to its proper place according to the brigand's ideas. The death of such a fellow was but a small, a very subordinate matter; but that he should die after Don Q. had promised him deliverance—ah, that was, for the moment, the most important question the world contained. As difficulty after difficulty rose in the way of the man's release, so the chief became more and more inflamed with the lust of victory over them. At one time, indeed, the position appeared impossible enough, and there is little doubt but that Don Q., in his long days of moody contemplation, had more than once dwelt on the thought of a

rescue by force of arms on the Sunday morning, trusting to his popularity with the lower orders for sufficient help to insure success. This was before the illuminating idea had flashed upon him, an idea so congenial that he did not hesitate to act upon it.

As the Duquesa's well-known carriage, with its sweating horses, drew up in the *patio,* servants ran to open the door and usher the guest into the house with all the ceremony due to her rank; but the lady swept away the fingers of the nearest.

"No, no, no!" she cried, in a hoarse, excited whisper, "have you heard nothing?—General Ubrique?"

"The illustrious general is here," said the man, who had thrown open the carriage door.

"What—here? Is he then still alive? Alas, poor general!"

The choked words amazed the man. He stared stupidly at the great lady, who seemed to be trembling with agitation in the dusky interior of the coach.

"Come, come," croaked the voice, "an answer, you rogue, or I will deal with you—I mean I will request some *caballero* to beat you soundly in my name. Come, answer me, is the general still alive?"

"Illustrissima, he was but now dancing in the saloon," stammered the servant.

"I am in time! Quickly, go and beg his excellency to speak with me here. Be off, or I will make you regret——"

But the man was gone.

General Ubrique was, at the time of which we write, a personage whom Spain delighted to honour. Risen from a lower rank of life, he had already

attained eminence. Suave, strong, unscrupulous perhaps, but both courageous and able. A wise politician, and an iron-handed soldier, he found himself, while still on the hither side of middle age, reckoned by many as a rival of Weyler himself. The man's whole soul held but one thought, a craving ambition that nothing could satisfy, and for which he was ready to sacrifice all.

The Duquesa d'Orava's dominant temper and her caustic tongue, backed by immense wealth and wide connections, had made her a power in the land, and as such Ubrique had always endeavoured to stand well with her.

Therefore, on receiving her message, he hurried out bareheaded to see her.

He was a handsome man, with a slight but powerful figure, and the sharp eyes in the carriage took careful note of him as he passed under the light and bowed with a touch of flattering eagerness in his courtesy at the carriage door.

"Come, my friend, come," moaned the Duquesa, "get in beside me, I dare not risk descending! Come, I will relate to you the whole plot," she added in a whisper. "Oh! how frightful have been my sufferings, lest I should be too late to save you!"

Ubrique hesitated. He hardly knew what to think of the information the Duquesa had sprung upon him.

"I have no words to thank you——" he began.

But the Duquesa stopped him.

"I have no need of words. Come, General, enter." She laid her slender hand on his wrist. Looking down at it, he recognized the blazing diamond in the marquise ring on her forefinger. After all, he must humour her.

He bowed his dark head and got into the carriage, taking the seat opposite to his old friend with her inconvenient fears and anxieties.

"Don Ermelo, a plot has been formed against you." The Duquesa bent forward and laid her hand affectionately upon his as the carriage rolled slowly out of the *patio,* and took its way back through the Alameda. "I could not exist without giving you——"

There was a strange, muffled sound, for the Duquesa had flung the cloak with its insufferable feathers over her companion's head, unseen hands had drawn his feet from under him, and he fell into the bottom of the carriage, half smothered, but struggling desperately.

Meantime the coach increased its pace.

Far outside the town on a wooded hillside it stopped, and in the darkness General Ubrique found himself, still gagged and bound, carried through the trees and laid on the ground in a little *choza* where a lantern burned dimly.

After the lapse of a little time, a man wrapped closely in a cloak, in the manner of all Spanish men after nightfall, came to the doorway and stood looking down at the prostrate figure. Then he stooped and slipped the gag from Ubrique's mouth.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" Ubrique exclaimed.

"It means that there is a small matter to be settled between us in the next half hour."

It is very hard to be dignified when you lie on your back and address a person standing over you. Ubrique felt very conscious of this disadvantage, but he did what he could to put the verve of authority into his voice.

"We had better understand each other at once. First, who are you?"

The other laughed unpleasantly. "I fancy you can very well guess my name," he answered.

"You are, then, the rascal known as Don Q."

"I am Don Q., and, lest you should unwisely forget the fact, remember you are my captive. As long as you are that, I demand civility, otherwise you will die." The fragile yellow hand went up as the General was about to break into violent speech, the same hand on which he had seen the well-known diamonds. "Peace! You can throw away your life if you like, but I may remind you that you have a good deal to live for. Your sagacity has already told you that blustering here will be of no earthly benefit to you."

Ubrique pondered. There was something in this view of the case.

"How long do you propose to keep me? It is a matter of ransom, of course?" he said at length.

"It may be called so. But the affair is a little out of the common. For your life I ask the life of another man. In the prison of Castelleno lies a certain Robledo, condemned to death. He must be restored to liberty."

"I met the governor of the prison this evening. This fellow is a desperate character. Special precautions——"

"I know that minutely!"

"He is to die to-morrow morning."

"For your sake, I hope not; because, whatever the fate of Robledo, that will be exactly your fate."

The General smiled slowly.

"Ah! and what do you want me to do?"

"Merely to write a letter hinting to the governor

that you have absolute evidence of Robledo's innocence. Avoid details."

"In other words, you wish me to procure the release of Robledo in exchange for giving me my life?"

"Precisely, señor."

"Unloose my hands and bring me pen and paper."

General Ermelo Ubrique wrote rapidly for a few moments.

"Shall I tell you what I have written, señor?" he said; and, as Don Q. bowed, he added, "my letter is naturally to the governor of the prison. I have told him how I was brought here by a stratagem; that my death is certain unless the condemned felon Robledo, who I find belongs to Don Q.'s own band, is released by way of exchange for my life. You follow me?"

"But certainly. It is to the point;" and the chief laughed in his least attractive fashion.

The General glanced sharply up at him.

"Listen further. 'Such a suggestion proves this brigand's incapacity to understand the code of honour which rules the life of a gentleman of Spain. I beg you will at once have this Robledo put to death."

He waited to hear the brigand's comments. But oh, *Madre de Dios,* he reflected, it was hard to die for so trivial a cause as this, when life was full of promise. Still, to endure threats, to yield to maltreatment at the hands of a robber—no! it could not be!

"You desire my opinion?" asked the chief, with a courtesy that chafed, for there was a smile lurking behind it.

The General scowled.

"You shall have it," went on the smooth, sibilant tones. "You have done absolutely as I expected you to do. Pray accept my congratulations. It is the act of a brave man! More, also, it is absolutely the letter I myself, Don Q. of the sierra, would have written in your place, if"—his livid-lidded glance fixed itself on Ubrique and held his eyes—"if I had not been rather less of a fool than you are!"

Perhaps there is no man living who would not have admired himself in the position Don Ermelo Ubrique had chosen to take up. He had accepted death for the sake of honour. It is little wonder that he turned furiously on Don Q.

"I could not expect you to understand. You, who are——"

"Hush!" the word hissed out like a bullet. "Listen, before you rashly condemn. I know much about you, Don Ermelo. I have watched your career with attention—if I did not fear to unduly elate you I might almost say with interest; I think you might yet do much for Spain. But if you die here to-day, what will the world know of you? That you were taken by a grotesque stratagem, duped by an impersonation you should have been keen enough to fathom. In every *fonda* the story will be told against you. You will be mourned, not with tears, but with laughter. You were a brave man, perhaps, but a fool, they will say; and Don Q. bamboozled you—that old vulture of the mountains masquerading as the proudest Duquesa in the land! Man, die if you will, but do not ruin your reputation!"

Ubrique's colour changed to a chilly pallor as he listened. It was true, all that this mountain wolf said; that was the horror of it, it was true! Death,

which atones for so much, could not cover him from the ridicule of the people! It was more than he could endure; he turned his eyes to the floor and groaned.

"There is also another matter I would urge upon you. The Duquesa d'Orava is concerned in this affair to a certain extent. Her name, too, will be roughly mouthed when the details are known. I have reason to believe that she would give much to bury all that has passed this night in silence——".

"The Duquesa? I had forgotten! What have you done with her?"

"She is safe in a valley yonder. Will you be advised? There is but a short time to spare. I would rescue Robledo if possible—he buys my tobacco for me."

"He is a smuggler?"

"No, not exclusively," Don Q. assured him, as if anxious to bear witness to the good points of his follower. "He is, moreover, young, brave, and ambitious, as you are yourself. Why not spare him?"

Ubrique set his teeth. The ridicule of Spain—of Europe! Already he seemed to hear the derisive story—the inextinguishable laughter!

"Go on. What have you to propose?" he muttered between his teeth.

"Simply this. A little note to the governor saying that for reasons of State, Robledo must be set at liberty and sent at once to the Castillo Negro, where the Duquesa would question him as to certain matters she has gained knowledge of. This will tally with your"—Don Q. smiled—"with your appearance at the palace of Santolalla. You will be credited with discovering a conspiracy and cleverly stamping it out at its birth. You and the Duquesa."

Ubrique considered. "I hate it! It is unworthy!"

Don Q. shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will, but you have only five more minutes in which to decide."

Sullenly the General drew the writing materials to his knee again, and in silence handed the note to the chief.

"From this moment the affair is lost in oblivion. Your reputation is saved, general. I offer you my congratulations," said Don Q. "The government have complained that I do not pay duty on my cigarettes. I am paying it this time—in my own coin, perhaps, but what would you?"

Long after Ubrique met the old Duquesa at the court of Madrid. The two looked oddly at each other, then the General spoke reluctantly.

"They say that Don Q. and his band have been exterminated."

"I don't believe it," replied the old lady with vigour.

"They have sent troops and *guardias civiles*——"

"Poof!" cried she, with an expressive gesture. "We have had good priests since the world began —but there is yet the devil."

CHAPTER XXII

HOW DON Q. HAD DEALINGS WITH A USURER

ROBLEDO, during his sojourn in the city, which perforce followed upon his pardon, did not I fear among his intimates remain entirely silent on the subject of Don Q.'s mysterious powers. As a matter of fact he discoursed on the fascinating subject with a good deal of pride, nor did he lack hearers. Recitals showing forth the sagacity, foresight, kindness, cruelty, and other superlative qualities of the lord of the sierra filled many a man with desire for the wild life of the mountains. Yet afterwards the hearts of some grew faint, and some inclined to wiser counsels, but amongst the few who actually reached the *Boca de Lobo* was Juan Sorio, and he was led by Robledo himself to the mouth of the famous cave.

"You desire, Juan Sorio," Don Q. said, "to become one of my children?" By this term the famous brigand often designated his followers.

"Yes, lord, I desire it."

The new recruit, little more than a boy, met the chief's eyes without flinching.

"And why do you desire this?"

The lad was well-grown, though he looked hunger-bitten. His brows met in a scowl.

"Because I have an enemy."

"Is it conceivable that you imagine your private enmities will be forwarded by entering my service?" inquired Don Q. harshly. "Those who join us in the mountains forget their own desires, for they

realize from the moment of enlistment that their sole excuse for existing lies in furthering mine."

The lad's face whitened.

"Down there in the plains many told me differently," he answered. "They said that my lord of the sierra held a wonderful scale of justice—the only one in Spain in which the rich man and the poor were fairly weighed one against the other."

Don Q. dropped the end of his cigarette into the fire.

"I perceive you have a story to tell me. Tell it shortly."

"The beginning of it goes back twenty years, to the time of the great snow. My lord remembers it; how we poor ones made holes through the snow into our dwellings. At that time my father and my mother had not long been married. My father was a shepherd, and, like many of our people, he spent much money on his marriage feast. Who could have expected such a winter?"

Don Q. nodded.

"In spite of the cold and the hunger, lord, those two were happy. But the days grew darker and the cold more bitter, and it seemed they must starve. I have no skill in the story. As it happened, so I tell it—not otherwise. At the last my father went down into Malaga, where he heard there lived one who lent money to the poor."

"And by what name was this usurer known?"

"They call him Señor Iapoulo, lord. And to him during that winter my father was forced to go more than once or twice—you would not have had him see his wife die? Sometimes Iapoulo would not give money, but a barrel of dried fish or a bag of flour. These Iapoulo gave to my father, always

making him sign papers. In six months, so it was written in the papers, each barrel bred another barrel. Thus, lord, the debt grew, and became very heavy." The lad paused a moment and sighed. "Yet when the sun shone again we were happy, and my father paid the usury year by year, though we were often hungry. I do not know, lord, how many times over my father paid his debt to Iapoulo —more than sixty times that which he had borrowed, I have heard him say. But the debt remained on the papers—sometimes more—sometimes less."

"Ah, unhappy ones! it is always so," commented the brigand.

"Then, señor of the mountains, my father died two years ago, and I, who lived alone with my mother, swore to gather the full price of the debt, that we might be free. I journeyed into Malaga to the house of Iapoulo, and they told me the sum of the debt that remained, and the day on which I should pay it and be free. So, lord, we worked early and late, late and early, and we gathered the money. And on the appointed day I entered Malaga and went to the place where Iapoulo does business. They said he was not there, so I asked if any could give me quittance of my debt, and they told me no, but that I should return on the morrow and see the señor. On the following day I was early at his bureau, and they brought me in before him. 'Ah, Juan, have you brought some of the money due?' he said. 'All of it, señor,' I answered very joyously, but he frowned when I counted it out before him. 'It is not enough,' he said; 'yesterday it had been enough, but not to-day. Why did you not come yesterday as you were bidden?' Then I told

him of my coming the day before, and how they had denied him to me, but he would not believe, and he called me many names and clutched his knees with his fingers, and his eyes were like black beads when the firelight shines into them."

"How did it end?" demanded Don Q.

"I cried to him that indeed I had come, whereat he sent for those who refused me entrance. They came, lord of the mountains, and with oaths swore that never before had they beheld me, and then Señor Iapoulo grinned, well satisfied, and said—'Give me the money you have brought and I will forgive your lies. Go, be industrious and render to me next year what has accrued. It is the law.'

"Then fury seized me and I cried out that if this was the law, then would I be a lawbreaker for ever, and I swore that for that thing which he had done to me Iapoulo should yet come to die. He feared, lord of the mountains, for he called aloud for help, but I broke away from them all, and because I could not see my mother's face when I should tell her of our wrong, I ran to the mountains, and"—he flung out his hand with one of those fine gestures that is inbred in his race—"I have come to demand justice of my lord."

"The story you have told me does indeed show this Iapoulo in a very villainous light," remarked Don Q. sadly. "I fear the fellow is an incurable ruffian, for I have heard similar tales of his doings before. To rob a rich man, or rather, I should say, to ease him of a part of the burden which he carries, is an act of merit; to rob a poor man is a crime; but to rob a woman, most of all a poor woman, one of those kindly ones on whom is based the very life of this Spain of ours, that is a deed which cries

aloud for punishment. Know you if this Iapoulo ever travels in the mountains when he moves to and fro upon his business?"

"Never, lord; he never leaves Malaga. Besides, the governor has warned all travellers, and Iapoulo has made a vow never to approach within twenty miles of this place."

"Why should this be?" asked the brigand.

"He fears my lord."

"Ah," said Don Q., shaking his head, "such a fear shows that he carries a bad conscience. When a man pointedly avoids me, I almost always find he has something on his mind for which I could give him absolution, in this world at any rate. Now, in the matter of Iapoulo, you think he cannot be enticed into the mountains?"

"It is impossible, lord," replied Juan.

Don Q.'s gaze flickered angrily over him. "I begin to believe I must ask you to do away with yourself," he said harshly.

The lad stepped back in dismay, one hand catching at the neck of his ragged coat.

"How have I offended my lord?"

"You have used a word that I have not heard spoken in connection with myself for many more years than you can number. Go, I will pass it over for this time, but remember that in the mountains all things are possible and most things come to pass."

Long after the young man had left him, and far into the night, Don Q. sat brooding over the points of the story he had heard, and the problem of Iapoulo's dislike to venturing within reach of the mountains.

From time to time his eyes ranged round the walls of his cave, their rich appointments lit by the flame of his pine-fed fire. The cave was furnished with the goods of many men, for Don Q. had often told his captives (when the mood for speech was upon him), that naked he had come into the mountains. "Yes, señor," he would say, "every little article in this place is full of memories for me. These two charming bronzes of Peace and Love I took from a French count, who was a connoisseur. That tapestry, upon which is embroidered the beautiful allegorical figure of Mercy, was among the effects of Don Jaimé, who so sadly failed in collecting his ransom some fifteen years ago. This picture I saved when I was forced to burn the house of a noble who had harried my men." And so forth.

But on the night of which we write, after some four hours of loneliness and pondering upon the matter of Iapoulo, the brigand's gaze was arrested by the picture already referred to—a painting of dark suggestions, that opened up to him a new vista of thought.

The picture represented an old-time Spaniard, who, with the arrogance of a conqueror, was demanding the key to some treasure-house of Guatamala or Peru.

The artist had produced the expression of stony and disdainful greed upon the Spaniard's face with so vivid, so fierce a strength that full power of the scene rushed back across three hundred years and lived upon the canvas seen in the light of the pine-flare. The bird-of-prey passion in it spoke to Don Q. He began pacing up and down, throwing his eye every now and again upon the picture.

Presently he went to the entrance and looked out.

The night was without hope of stars, and the gaunt world beneath him was wrapped in its own darkness, except where the camp fires, beside which his men slept, were slowly dying. Don Q. stepped out into the gloom and descended the cliff path. At its foot the sentinel, a great loose fellow in a pointed hat, challenged him within handgrip. The brigand caught the man by the shoulder.

"Animal!" he hissed; "do you not know *me?*"

The man stammered some abject words, and Don Q. passed down to the level of the fires. Their flickering showed the bandits sprawling in a score of strange postures. Don Q. overlooked them, hearing their heavy breathing with disgust. When he reached the furthest of the fires, round which only three figures were stretched, he kicked the embers into a blaze, and then awoke the sleeper nearest to him in the same manner.

The man sprang to his feet, as one used to alarms, in an attitude of defence. Under the yellow handkerchief bound about his head he showed a face young and handsome, but worn with the premature ageing that always falls on the mountaineer. His hands dropped as he recognized Don Q.

"My litter of hogs sleep heavily," remarked the chief with a sibilant scorn. "A bull might trample in among you and leave you snoring—much less an enemy. Follow me."

Silently the pair mounted to the cave. From his chair beside the fire Don Q. gazed long and searchingly at the young man—the most trusted of all his followers.

"Robledo, I am about to assign to you an errand. Listen therefore very carefully." He paused for some moments before resuming. "You, although

a man grown, cannot remember the day when I was not in the sierra. And I still am here to-night. During that period, so men say in the plains, I have amassed much treasure, and some have lost their lives in seeking for it. Is not this so?"

Robledo inclined his head.

"It is, in fact, true that I have held many great and notable persons to ransom, as well as those of the lesser rank. Men of wealth have gladly paid me half their fortunes for the privilege of bidding me good-bye. To regain men of genius, the world has pulled wide its purse-strings. Some few captives have indeed remained for ever in the sierra."

Don Q. stopped again and seemed to ponder, yet ever his eye dwelt on Robledo, who stood bronze-pale, erect, and patient, but filled with misgiving. For his lord had never been known to speak in such a fashion to one of his following. It was his habit to throw them a few stern words, no more.

"Now, although I have never allowed myself to be influenced by sordid considerations," went on Don Q. in his sibilant voice, "I have, in truth without effort, collected riches that might perhaps vie with those of the Count of Monte Cristo, with whose fame, I fear, you, Robledo, are unacquainted. Much of this wealth lies buried in the mountains."

Robledo's quickened breath betrayed his mounting distress, for what might not these strange confidences portend?

"I have at various times secreted it in three hiding-places, to which I have given the names of Padre, Madre, and Niño. You follow me? Good. The treasure Padre is infinitely greater than the one named Madre, and Madre in turn exceeds by a hundred times the baby, the treasure Niño. Here

is a paper upon this table. It contains a plan, by which any seeker can find the spot where Niño lies buried. Further, whoever finds Niño will find also a second plan leading them to Madre, and he who has the courage to seek Madre, will discover a third plan leading to Padre. I had these plans made for my heirs, but I have now changed my mind." He rose, and, walking to the table, took up an envelope.

"Here is the plan to Niño. This document, my child, I am about to give into your charge. You will carry it down into the city, and lodging with, it may be, the uncle of Isabelilla"—Robledo looked sharply up—"you will, with much discretion and care, sell this plan to one Iapoulo, a usurer, whose dwelling is within a stone's-throw of the bull-ring. To this man you will represent yourself as a traitor to and a hater of me. You will not let this plan go under a good sum, Robledo—20,000 pesetas is the lowest price to be accepted—and Iapoulo can pay you when he returns to the city after finding the treasure."

The young man waited, for it was evident that Don Q. had more to say.

"Yes, Niño is worth far more than 20,000 pesetas, but that is to be your price. My child, would you betray me for 20,000 pesetas?"

Robledo lifted his face, reddening under the tan.

"My lord knows," he answered with passion.

Don Q. looked at him curiously.

"I almost believe I can trust you, Robledo," he said; and, indeed, never had he in all his career permitted himself to speak thus to one of his band. "But you must refrain from becoming sentimental, Robledo," he added. "I fear if you became sentimental I should be obliged to rid myself of you."

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW DON Q. HAD DEALINGS WITH A USURER

As he journeyed down through the mountains, surprise and wonder shared rule over the heart and imagination of the mountaineer. The midnight colloquy; the story of Padre, Madre, and Niño; the extraordinary errand on which he had been commanded; this selling of the secret of the hidden treasures—all surged together in his bewildered brain. But on arriving in Malaga he remembered that the thing he had to do was simple enough. Thus, having lodged himself as Don Q. had foretold, he very soon managed to open up negotiations with the moneylender Iapoulo.

It is sufficient to say that a bargain was soon struck, especially as the payment, though large, was not to change hands until the treasure had actually been found and brought into Malaga. So it happened that Iapoulo did buy Robledo's secret; did, with infinite precautions, steal up into the bush-grown ravine not far above the foothills, and bear away the treasure named Niño.

Instead, however, of proving his gratitude to Robledo, no sooner had Iapoulo re-entered Malaga, after his successful robbery, than, recalling the fact that he owed the ex-brigand 20,000 pesetas, the usurer at once put the police on his track. It may be that Iapoulo's countenance had not inspired Robledo with confidence, or perhaps he received due warning through a friend, but, at any rate, when the

police raided his poor quarters the man had vanished.

He passed up into the mountains, glad again to feel the free winds upon his cheek, and coming to the *Boca de Lobo,* told the history of his dealings with Iapoulo to Don Q.

Meantime, and while these things were going forward to such fortunate issues, no more delighted man than the usurer existed in Malaga. He felt that his long life of effort to amass wealth had in some sort met its reward. From the smallest of Don Q.'s treasures he had taken a large sum. He held the plan to the second, which the rascally brigand, who had sold (here he laughed) the secret, declared to be at least ten times as large. Without delay he must carry off the rest before Don Q. discovered his earlier loss.

Upon examining the plan which located the treasure Madre, Iapoulo found, somewhat to his dismay, that it was situated in a far deeper recess of the sierra than had been the case with Niño. It cannot be said that he was constitutionally a brave man, and the mere idea of the great brigand swooping down from his eyrie upon the thief who was rifling his hidden riches made the usurer feel actually ill. But second thoughts awoke the greed of gold, and he reflected that good fortune had crowned his first attempt, why should it not be so again?

Iapoulo at this period, and for some ten years previously, had held in his power an unfortunate man whom he used as his confidential clerk. This man, who was known everywhere in the city by his nickname Simio, was nearly six feet in height, with of a pair of long and crooked legs, and a big hairless face, flat-nosed and undershot. He had also the

largest appetite in Spain, and was in the habit of complaining that he could number on the fingers of one hand the few occasions on which he had reached the harbour of satiety. He led a shifting life, for he generally tried to lodge *en pension.*

Together with his enormous appetite, Simio was possessed of immense muscular strength. On account of this excellent quality, and also because Simio could not for many reasons betray him, the usurer fixed on the clerk as his companion on his trips into the mountains. Realizing that safety possibly lay in haste, the pair found themselves five days later among the stony bleakness of the higher sierra.

Iapoulo was mounted upon a mule, that was being led up a steep ascent by his gigantic retainer. All around them was no sign of life. Over a huge prospect of brown boulders and patches of snow the wind sang wearily, blowing from a sky in which the eyes could pierce past minaret-shaped clouds to infinite and chilly distances. Iapoulo, a greasy creature, wrapped about the head and shoulders with dingy cloths, raised his face to speak.

"You have gone too far! We shall find ourselves in the clutches of the vulture. Imbecile! you have mistaken the way!" he whispered venomously.

"No, master," returned Simio, also whispering; "this gorge opening out ahead is indeed the spot upon the little map. Did I not lead you straightly before?"

"Yes, but you did not then spend five days crawling deeper and deeper into a web of paths far beyond human existence. We have not seen even a goatherd since the sun sank on Thursday." Iapoulo

dragged hard at the reins. "What—what is that behind the rock?"

Simio had caught the infection of fear. "It is no more than a dead bush, but let us hasten. Once we reach the cave, no man can see us." He struck nervously at the mule, pulling it forward.

The noise of their movements seemed to echo and re-echo among the silences of the great shouldering hills. The sun shot in a blaze to the zenith behind a mountain peak, but their path lay in cold shadow. A raven, the earliest bird to move to its evening rest, croaked overhead, as they topped the rising path and began to descend by a breakneck track into a forbidding gorge, where two great carrion birds rose with slanting wings, hovered and then dropped away out of sight over the further ridge. The two men looked after them almost regretfully. Any living thing seemed to lessen the weight of that horrible isolation.

Between his anxiety to hide himself from the imagined eyes that beset the solitude, and the fear of breaking his neck, Iapoulo's orders grew more confused with every moment. But when the lowest point of the track was reached Simio halted and looked about him.

"There, master," he said, nodding his head to the right.

Iapoulo, crouched upon the mule, saw above him a strange rock, shaped like a fungus, behind which rose the cliff. In that grey place each little deformed bush had whipped a hole on the hither side of it, worn by the ceaseless beating of the branches as they flipped and struggled in the unpitying wind.

"Forward! Hasten!" said the usurer in the

hoarse whisper he had used during his passage through the windings of the sierra.

Simio drew on the mule, and in a few moments they had skirted the fungus-rock and stood before a dark opening shrouded by a hanging brake of thorns. Iapoulo slipped off his mount with unexpected quickness, and bade his man go ahead into the cave and see if any foe lurked there. Meanwhile he hid himself as best he could and waited.

Very soon, however, Simio returned, and in a quavering tone assured him of safety. The moment of entering that dark aperture had been one of tremendous self-conquest for the wretched man, who, browbeaten all his life, had learnt most fully the terrible lesson of fear.

They tied up the mule at a little distance, and Iapoulo followed Simio into the grotto. It was an ordinary cave enough, but Iapoulo was not used to caves, and the lurking shadows on all sides, the low frowning roof, and the mysterious drip, drip of water, now on one side, now on the other, shook his quivering nerves. The lantern he had brought seemed only to add to the terrors of the place.

"Let us to work. Where is the map? Hold the lantern steady, fool!" The usurer studied the plan for a moment, then, hurrying across the dusty floor, plunged his hand into a crevice in the corner and drew out a rusty nail.

"This is the sign. Come, let us dig."

Big crooked Simio whirled up a pickaxe, and between his blows Iapoulo struck excitedly at the rocky earth with a spade; but progress was slow. The night deepened into the small hours; still they laboured until the pickaxe, pioneering its way downward, struck and stuck in wood. A few more

cautious efforts, and a long and dirty box was disclosed. Iapoulo, too impatient to wait for it to be raised, bade Simio wrench off the lid.

It was done. A whitened skeleton lay stretched out within. The empty jaws grinned up at the two men as they stood stiff with the shock, gaping down upon it! Then across the lantern's light a shadow leaped to Iapoulo's feet and a touch fell on his shoulder.

With a yell he wrenched his head round to see he knew not what. The colour had drained from his damp face, his eyes shone white like those of a vicious horse, his upper lip was drawn back in a grin of fear. He stood immovable, his clutching hands still outspread, while the drops gathered and fell from his bald forehead, as he stared back at a cloaked figure bearing a singular likeness to the brooding carrion birds which he had seen on his journey into the mountains.

"May I inquire upon what you busy yourselves, señor?" asked Don Q.'s suave sibiliant voice at last.

In the long pause Iapoulo collected his wits a little.

"This man," he indicated Simio, "implored me to come and dig out some treasure which long ago he said he had buried here."

"Pah!" Don Q. spat out with disgust. "Do I not know you, Señor Iapoulo? You bought my secret and would now steal my treasure. Did I not see you in the little wineshop of Malaga where the girls danced, while you whispered in the corner with a man whose brows were bound about with a handkerchief of yellow? Corpse of a scullion! My ears are keen. I can hear the eggs break when the *quebranta-huesos* hatches its young in the sunshine!"

Don Q. turned to the men behind him. "Pull this man out of the hole and set him before me!"

Iapoulo's bullying temper mounted.

"I have been trapped!" he snarled. "This villain has betrayed me!"

"No, master, no!" wept Simio urgently.

"Peace!" Don Q. raised his hand. "You have in truth been betrayed, Iapoulo, but by your own greed. Only the passion to possess could have drawn you here beneath my shadow. You robbed me once of a hoard, and became brave enough to try and rob again. I will leave you to think over your crimes. Good-night."

Iapoulo would have rushed forward, but Gaspár's big hands held him. "Am I to be imprisoned in a hole?" he shrieked.

Don Q. turned back. "By no means," he returned politely. "You have come up of your own free will into the sierra, and although I cannot offer you my own hospitality, I can recommend this *posada,*" he waved his hand round the grotto. "Juan, bring here your bill of fare. This, señor, is the *patrón.*"

The fact that his helpless young creditor should hold a place in this nightmare adventure seemed to Iapoulo scarcely surprising at the moment. Yet he spurned the paper held out by the lad, and spoke again to Don Q.

"You will set me free. I have done you no harm. I have been betrayed, I tell you!" The brigand stopped on his way to the entrance and turned slowly about.

"The meals in this inn are served but once a day," he said coldly. "If you will not choose now, you cannot eat for twenty-four hours."

"Oh, master, master, and I am hungry," wailed Simio.

The usurer took the bill of fare ungraciously, but as his glance fell upon its items he gave a cry.

"Explain, Juan," commanded Don Q.

"This is my *posada*," said the young man sullenly. "Those are my prices. If the señor would eat, he must pay my price."

"One night's lodging, 2000 pesetas each guest; fire, 2000; black bread, 2000; sausages, each, 5000 pesetas," Iapoulo read aloud. "I shall not pay. I am here against my will. Legally——"

"Will the law feed you and warm you and give you to drink?" asked Don Q. "Moreover there is no law here—merely equity."

"But you dare not starve me!"

"Why not? You can buy and eat if you will."

"But I have no money," retorted Iapoulo desperately.

"Then you must send for some."

Iapoulo groaned.

"Your orders, señor," said Juan.

"One small loaf, half a sausage, and some water," demanded Iapoulo.

"And for this gentleman?"

"For Simio? Nothing!"

"Oh, master, would you starve me?"

"If you cannot pay, you must starve," said Iapoulo.

Simio howled aloud. This fate far exceeded his worst fears.

"Señor," interposed Don Q., "you have yourself appealed to the law. By the law therefore you must hold. A master is bound to provide food for his servant under circumstances such as these, for

you persuaded him to follow you for your own purposes into—I fear—an inhospitable region. He is, moreover, a man of twice your size, and will therefore require on a just computation double as much food. Come, we must see justice done. Hear me, Juan, when the señor orders food for his own repast, you will bring double the quantity for this poor servant, who weeps for hunger."

"Will my lord pardon me?" A tall young mountaineer stepped out from the rank of Don Q.'s followers. His brows were bound with a yellow handkerchief, and his dark eyes gleamed as he set the butt of his musket on the floor and rummaged in his shirt for a moment.

"What is this, Robledo?"

"I should like my account settled, lord. This señor bought from me a certain precious thing in the plains, for which he promised me a payment of 20,000 pesetas, which he failed to pay." Robledo brought out a ragged paper from his vest. "It is written here, lord."

Don Q. took the paper and glanced over it. "A fair demand," he remarked.

"What have you to say, señor?" he addressed Iapoulo.

But Iapoulo had no answer ready. He recognized the handsome face, the bold air of the mountaineer he had betrayed.

"Speak!" The sharp command startled the usurer.

"I have no money," he replied bitterly. "When will you let me go?"

"As soon as you have paid your just debts, señor. This man"—he laid a slender, yellow finger on Robledo's shoulder—"I will permit to be your mes-

senger. To-morrow, at the first light, you will deliver to him a letter for your agent in Malaga. By the way, Juan, the señor wants paper, pen, and ink."

Juan at once produced them.

"The pen is 1000 pesetas, the ink 500, and each sheet of paper is 1000," he said as he handed them to Iapoulo.

"I do not need them." The usurer believed he could score a point. "If I refuse to write what can you do?"

"The alternative is simple," replied Don Q., and bending towards Iapoulo he whispered a few words in his ear.

"No, no, I will write!" cried the man, tearing a sheet of paper in two. "You see, I use but half," he added.

"Pray do not be hasty, señor," implored Don Q. "Rather, be very careful to ask for enough money, or perhaps we shall be forced to speak together again of alternatives."

Then in an instant they were gone—the vulture-faced brigand and his swarthy, grinning band. Iapoulo found himself in the darkness. He felt each limb. He was sound and free, therefore surely he could escape. He rushed towards the opening of the cave, and against a grating that had been silently fastened over it. He clung to the bars, listening to the wind and to the strange sounds that float about mountain sides in the night-time. The world he knew lay five days of hard travel away, beyond many treacherous and desolate gorges. He did not heed the powerful snoring of Simio, who had seized on the loaves and sausage the brigands left behind them, and, having eaten and come to the conclusion

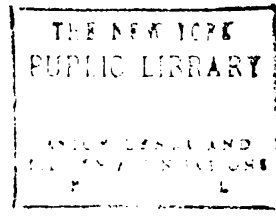
that there were worse folk abroad than the vulture of the sierra, had fallen contentedly asleep.

Presently Iapoulo became lost in a maze of calculations, which he worked out with knitted brows. Five days must be allowed for the messenger to go to Malaga, five to return, also one to spend in the city—that made eleven in all. Each day he would eat half a sausage and half a loaf of black bread. Simio—here he turned a savage look upon his sleeping retainer—would eat a whole sausage and one loaf of black bread. Between them they would drink three small bottles of water. Their daily lodging cost 4000 pesetas. Thus he computed that each day in the mountains would cost him 19,500 pesetas. He moaned, rocking himself to and fro at the thought of such a sum. But when he multiplied it by eleven the tears trickled down his discoloured cheeks, for, alas! to this total he must add the debt owing to Robledo.

It was long before he found courage to name the whole amount, even to himself. When he realized that a monstrous slice of his fortune was slipping away from him he hid his face in his hands and for some moments told himself he would prefer death. But as the dreadful words whispered by Don Q. flashed back upon his memory he lifted the paper and wrote out the form of his letter, leaving one space blank.

"I am in the grip of Don Q.," the letter ran. "Send me at once—— pesetas by the bearer, without question or delay. Do not inform the authorities, for if an attempt be made to rescue me I shall be nailed to the pine-tree that grows nearest heaven upon the mountain above the place of my imprisonment."

Gave it through the bars into Robledo's hands.


THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

This note addressed to his representative in the city, he sat down to the hardest struggle of his life—the figure at which he should place the sum to be sent. Doubts assailed him. He did not wish to send for more money than was absolutely necessary, for he trusted not at all in the honour of the brigand, who he believed—and in this Iapoulo judged by himself—would break all his bargains and seize the uttermost farthing. Yet on the other hand, it might prove awkward to have less than the necessary sum; accidents might happen, the messenger might possibly not hurry himself, he might be twelve days on the journey. So the dawn came and the full day drew on, and still the usurer sat trying to make up his mind, when Robledo stood before him.

"Is the letter ready that my lord commanded me to take?" demanded the young bandit.

"Will you make very great haste on your errand?" asked Iapoulo.

"On my lord's errands one always hastens," replied Robledo.

"If you are back within eleven days, I will give you—I will give you ten, yes, ten pesetas for yourself." With these words Iapoulo wrote rapidly on the paper and gave it through the bars into Robledo's hands, crying out—"Go, go, before I repent!" and rushed into the darker end of the cave.

Days passed, and on each Iapoulo received but one visit. It was from Juan, who always brought with him the bill of fare, always heard the same order, and always bowed and withdrew in the same chilly silence. The mornings of this period were spent by Iapoulo in bemoaning the fact of his having sent for something above the sum he had calculated

would be actually due, but in the evenings, when he heard the trees moaning on the opposite ridge, he was almost resigned to his losses if he could but compass his escape. Sometimes he cursed Simio and spoke of the dreadful things that he would do to him when they had once more returned to the plains, until the half-wit wept and cried out—"No, master! No, master! have mercy on me!" to the gloomy echoes.

Early on the eleventh day Juan announced the return of Robledo, and a little later Don Q., with a few of his followers, entered the cave. Robledo laid a bag of pesetas and a roll of paper money at the usurer's feet.

"Now, señor, count your money," said the brigand, "and your creditors shall come in before you. Juan, stand out."

The lad at once stepped forward, bearing a long bill in his hand.

"How much does it amount to?" inquired Don Q.

"By careful counting, lord, it adds up to 234,500 pesetas."

Refusal to pay or any cavilling at the items being out of the question, Iapoulo, with many sighs, paid over the money.

"Now, Robledo, what is owing to you?" went on Don Q.

"20,010 pesetas, lord."

"No, no, no! The bargain was for 20,000," cried the usurer.

"What does this mean, Robledo?" asked the chief sternly.

"The señor made me a promise of ten pesetas, lord, if I returned by the eleventh day. I am here."

"It is false!" Iapoulo could not bear it: every peseta was dear as a drop of his own blood.

"You disappoint me, señor," said Don Q. quietly; "for although you could not see me, I heard you with my own ears make the man this promise. The debt is, indeed, 20,010 pesetas. Pay him quickly."

The last coin had scarcely passed from Iapoulo's reluctant fingers, when he wrapped his worn cloak about his neck. "Now I am free! I will go."

"Not too quickly," interposed Don Q. "Our little business is hardly yet concluded. You have paid your debt, señor, it is true, but not the interest, the usury."

"The interest?" screamed the money-lender.

"Yes," said Don Q. "Our debts in the mountains double themselves every three days. It is a bad custom, which you in the plains have taught to us. You still owe these two men enormous sums. I fear Robledo will have to make a second journey to the plains."

"Señor, this will ruin me. I cannot possibly pay it."

"So?" The brigand shrugged his shoulders regretfully. "Well, there is always the pine-tree."

"You had decreased my death in any case," cried Iapoulo.

"No," returned Don Q. "You shall indeed pay as far as your fortune allows. But since I know you cannot discharge these debts in full, I am about to offer you another chance of escape. You will cause to be delivered to Robledo all papers concerning all the debts owing to you."

"This is ruin." Iapoulo stood up obstinately. "I will not do this thing."

"You prefer the tree?"

"Yes."

"Bring him out, my children. You, Gaspár, I perceive, have already prepared the hammer and the nails."

Iapoulo was hustled to the entrance. He stood there a moment, gazing up at the great tree that creaked and swooped above him in the gale. The last remnant of defiance went out of the man. The love of money died in the struggle with the love of life.

"I will consent. But you are leaving me a beggar."

"Better a beggar than a dead man," observed Don Q. urbanely. "I congratulate you, señor. A moment more, and it would have been too late. Now I foresee that you and I will have a merry time burning all those documents that have pressed so heavily on the poor. Or, stay; better still. The season verges towards the New Year, and with your help, Señor Iapoulo, we will, by sending back these papers, put a ray of light into many of the homes of our good and kindly peasants."

As the brigand suggested, so the transaction was carried out, and Iapoulo went down to the city with a bitter mind. But he drew comfort from the thought of how he would deal with Simio and Juan when due time came.

He is still lying in wait for their reappearance.

For far away from Spain, and under other stars than those which burn in the blue sky of the Peninsula, Juan and Simio carry on a business which enables the young man to support his mother. For though it had been Juan's wish to join the brigands, Don Q. had not permitted it.

"Ours is, in truth, a very elevating and noble profession," he had said in response to the lad's request, "but it is not one suitable for the only son of a widow. Yet, rest happily, I will consider your case."

The upshot of this consideration was that Don Q. managed to get Juan, his mother, and Simio safely away to Buenos Aires, where he enabled the young man to set up a boliche, or frontier wineshop, in the province of the Rio Negro. It is a strange place, this boliche of wood and corrugated iron, and the wild and hardy Gauchos who patronize it often wonder at the sign which is fastened above the door. It represents a bird of the vulture species perched high on a ledge among the snows. Underneath is written—"The King of the Sierra."

"It is a *corancho*," says the Gaucho. "Condor," guess the Scottish herdsmen who visit the place. Both imagine that the sierra alluded to is the great chain of the Andes, which stretches from Peru to the Magellan Straits. But sometimes, when tongues are loosened, Juan or Simio will tell to some amazed circle of Gaucho *maté* drinkers the story of Iapoulo the usurer, his crimes and his atonement, and the narrator will then be led on to speak further of that king of the sierra who reigns six thousand miles away among the grey mountains of the motherland—of Spain the old and stricken, whose children have yet built up the two great republics of the south.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW DON Q. FOUGHT FOR HIS NAME

DURING his life of brigandage in the sierra, Don Q. earned for himself a name for relentless cruelty, but he was cruel only because cruelty was a necessary part of the equipment of a *sequestrador*. Wealth he despised, save as a means of power; for his life he cared little; indeed, he was wont to say that only when it stood in danger did it become endurable to him.

But there was one thing he valued, a possession held in the secret of his heart, cherished, guarded, beloved above all else the world contained. To this secret he could turn for solace during his long fits of despondency when the bitternesses of the past surged back to torture him. This secret, which he believed to be inviolate, set safe and high, far beyond the snatch of fate, which he never dreamed could again be jeopardized, was yet to cost him some of the fiercest moments of his life.

On an evening of late winter, Don Q., rising from his fireside, drew his cloak more closely round him, and, going out to the terrace before the cave, began pacing up and down. As he walked, he read from an old book of Spanish legends deeds of high emprise, carried through with a stateliness of courage that lends so great a distinction to many tales of Spanish chivalry. Presently he closed the book upon his finger, and as he walked amused his mind by comparing his own career with the mighty performances of old.

In the midst of his thoughts he drew up to peer curiously downwards at a young man who was making his way through the groups cooking, gambling, and smoking round the fires in the valley. He rushed up the path to the terrace, holding a mountaineer's leather bag at arm's length, and laying it carefully at Don Q.'s feet, sprang back to some distance.

"What is this, Felipe?" The chief's tone was an ice-douche.

Felipe, with terrified eyes glued on the bag, gasped—"A bottle, lord."

"Corpse of a scullion!" Don Q. snatched at his knife. "Fool! speak before I cut the words from your tongue!"

"The fathers from San Pedro sent it. It was found in the chapel before the altar yesterday. No man would carry it hither, for all said it must be an infernal machine. Then came Maria, the wife of Tomás, to confession. She brought it, lord."

Don Q. laughed till the young man winced and coloured.

"So it came by the hand of a woman, after all! Maria shall not be forgotten. Show the bottle to me."

Felipe jerked up his head and shivered like a frightened horse.

"It will blow us to fragments, lord."

The chief drew out his knife and pricked the man sharply in the thigh. Felipe started, cast one glance at Don Q. and caught the flickering malevolence in his eyes, then leaped to obey.

He raised the bottle with shaking hands. It was of a curious shape, made of some dark-stained thick glass; the cork, well rammed home in the neck, was

further secured by a strip of paper fastened over it. On this slip of paper was written, "Al Señor Don Q."

"Lay it down." The chief stood for a moment brooding. This was probably some new scheme against his life. "Felipe," he said at last, "tap that bottle with the hilt of your knife until you break it, then we will judge whether it be indeed an infernal machine."

The lad hesitated. But his chief's eye compelled. White-lipped he struck at the glass till Don Q.'s short patience gave way. He seized Felipe's hand over the knife-blade, forcing a strong blow. From the shivered fragments of the bottle fell out a letter.

Don Q. glanced at him.

"Hand me the letter and go!" he said.

By the crimson light of the sunset the brigand examined the letter. No uttermost presentiment of what that fateful paper contained came to him. He slit the envelope daintily with his knife, and drew out a half-sheet of paper, on which were traced three lines in the same delicate pointed hand which had written his name.

"Señor," the letter ran, "I invite you to meet me on Sunday at midnight at Las Lechuzas. For the sake of the name you once bore, you will not fail me, and you will come alone."

For signature there was a blood-red splash of sealing-wax bearing a deep and clear impression of a coat-of-arms. Don Q. looked at the seal and looked again, then with a groan turned to seek his cave.

Crouched over his fire he brooded long. Here was a blow well-aimed, and the more perilous because he was absolutely at a loss to know whose

hand delivered it. "The name you once bore." He repeated the words under his breath, and the first fear of his reckless life crept cold and small about his heart.

Nor did the slow processes of thought bring him to another mind. It was a trap, of course, and so baited that, from the point of view of his enemies, it must succeed—those enemies who had baited so many, each one of which had failed, to their confusion and the enhancement of the brigand's fame.

Looking round to make sure he was alone, Don Q. laid the letter upon his palm and studied it. Last of all his eye travelled to the seal, then hastily, passionately, like one who cannot believe his sight, he sprang up to bring it close to the light.

The exquisite lines and tracery reproduced on the seal he knew well, but it was one little flaw that held him fascinated. This letter had been sealed with his own signet ring, which he had chipped long ago in a hunting expedition, and that ring he had afterwards given to——. Before his eyes glowed and faded a pathetic procession of pictures—the panorama of his own life. He saw himself on a fragrant morning riding down the wild bulls to that first fall which tests their fitness for the bull-ring. He saw the eyes of his young love in the moonlight as he pressed this ring upon her finger at the instant when a blackness of treachery descended upon them both and severed him from her for ever.

The pride of his youth and of his young manhood passed before him. His loveless marriage day, the birth of his children, and then the dark hour when he knew but one way remained to carry the honour of his ancient name clear, and that was to give up all his great possessions and to die.

And in the eye of the world he had died, but the fierce blood in his veins had called to him to live somehow, in some fashion—hidden and unknown for ever, but secretly building up again those fallen fortunes of his house.

At length the brigand sighed heavily and sank back into his seat.

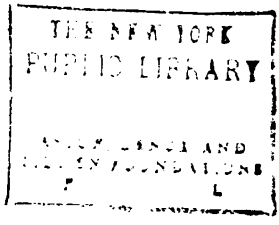
"It is sealed with my signet ring, I could not mistake it, the ring I gave to—*her* on that evening of calamity. You grow old César," he whispered to himself; "this has shaken you. Who possesses the ring now?"

After a while he brought out his autobiography and began to write—

"My name is threatened. It seems incredible, for I have been long in the sierra; so long that I myself can scarcely number the years. During those years but three men have suspected the name I once bore. A name of splendid traditions. I buried the third of these men fifteen years ago. When I turned from his grave, I thought I had had my last dealings with such menaces. I felt safe. I revelled in my security. It appears, alas! I was mistaken, and that is why I must now go down to Las Lechuzas alone.

"It may be a trap for my life, and that will mean defeat to all my hopes and my plans. I could indeed remain in safety here, and let them guess as they pleased perhaps, but for one thing. I am alone in the mountains, but in the world I am not quite alone. There is one other of whom I must think. If these animals know my name, of a surety they must know of her existence. If they can be base enough to bait a trap for me with my heart's blood, can I imagine they will show mercy to her? It may be they guess only and have no certain knowledge of

Don Q. sat bleak and solitary upon his horse.


THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

facts, but I must make sure, and, further, if chance befriends me, take means to close for ever lips that can babble so murderously."

Don Q. sat bleak and solitary upon his horse. He had come to the end of his journey. For two days he had been riding downwards through the mountains to keep *rendezvous* with his unknown enemy—a terrible ride, tortured with memories and harassed with suspense.

He halted, shadowed in the mouth of a narrow gorge, to reconnoitre the dim evening world of desolate slopes patched with snow and swampy lagoons that filled the field of vision. The single salient feature of the landscape was Las Lechuzas, a ruinous castellated building that stood up boldly on a mass of rock midway between the sierra and the water. It frowned against the sky, a black remnant of feudal times. No plume of smoke crawled from it into the cold air. It lay there deserted, enduring in its dumb isolation the slow passage of the years—of the centuries.

It struck strange upon the aroused senses of the lonely man who now looked upon it that this bleak, chilled shell so long uninhabited was about to be once more vivified by the entrance of throbbing human passions.

On one side of the mound on which Las Lechuzas was built clung a grove of straggling trees, battered and twisted by the winds of winter. While Don Q. halted, a drooping, yellowish cloud had drawn itself out like a hood over the mountain behind him, and now burst into a swirl of fine snow, so thick that Don Q., galloping for the wood under cover of its fall, might, as far as leaving tracks was concerned,

have risen from underground at the spot where he at length found himself, in the depth of a thicket amongst the trees.

He was absolutely alone, for he had no companion whom he could trust. As for the men in his band, with the exception, perhaps, of Robledo, he divided them into two classes—the first, whom he could rely on a little, for though wolfish they were fools; the rest, endowned with low cunning, he would not depend on at all.

He had come to the conclusion that his correspondent must have in view one object—gain. He would endeavor to force hush-money from the brigand whose immense fortune was the common talk and envy of the plains. Such a secret, affecting as it did the honour of a noble family, could not be trifled with, and, indeed, it was certain that Don Q.'s enemy had by some means become possessed of real information, that blown abroad would render decades of solitude and self-sacrifice vain. The chief's plan was a very simple one. To come face to face with his adversary, and to kill him. If he himself perished, what matter, so long as this great work was done.

It cannot be denied that the stigma of ferocity cast by many on Don Q. was not entirely unmerited, but few could refuse respect to the indomitable spirit that sent this frail unfriended man single-handed to such an encounter.

Neglecting no precaution that his long years of guerrilla warfare had taught him, he lay watching in the thicket until night fell. No living thing approached Las Lechuzas or came from it. Yet against the murk of darkness the chief saw a spark fly up and die over the building, and knew that

a fire was being kindled on one of its deserted hearths.

At once he began to move. To arrive before one is expected frequently disconcerts an enemy's tactics. Tying up his horse as near to the edge of the wood as possible, that it might be easy to find, Don Q. crept up to the building, through the ruined gateway, and across the court-yard. Within all was dark, silent, and mysterious.

The brigand knew himself to be at handgrips with the greatest crisis that had touched his life since he took to the mountains. This affair was unlike all that had gone before it, for his nameless enemies had discovered the one joint in his armour through which he might be pierced to the vitals.

As he moved stealthily forward along the stone passage where the night seemed solid, a chill wind came after him, gathering up the deathlike odours that cling about places man has inhabited and forsaken. His fingers had rounded a broken corner of wall, when a rush of warmer air brought him the pungent smell of kindling wood. He thrust out his head and saw the entrance to the great central hall, against which a broken door, torn probably from one of the outbuildings, was propped; through and behind this the light of a fire leaped and sank.

It has been said that Don Q. was a famous hunter; he crept noiselessly to the makeshift door and listened. Five minutes passed. No sound came from within but the intermittent anger of the fire as it roared and crackled among the wet wood. The brigand slipped off his coat and wrapped it shieldwise round his left arm, then thrust the door backward. It shook, rose, poised a second, and flapped

upon the floor, flinging up a cloud of dead old dust as it settled.

Don Q. slipped into the opening, and, seeing nothing but a high wooden screen that hid the fire, stood with his back against the wall until his eyes became accustomed to the light.

Still no sound.

After waiting a few moments he walked softly and swiftly round the screen. A great fire roared up the chimney, an empty stool was by the hearth; no more. Yes! He made out a figure drawn up into the darkest corner, between the screen and the outjut of the chimney; a figure, cloaked from head to foot.

"I have come," said Don Q. at last.

"With your knife in your hand," said a vibrating voice. "That is well."

Don Q.'s arm fell to his side. A woman!

She threw back her cloak and advanced into the full blaze—a tall girl with a passionate beauty that matched well her poignant voice.

"Pardon, señorita, I expected to meet with a very different person."

"But you are Don Q.?" she asked.

The brigand swept his sombrero to the floor.

Her tragic eyes lit up.

"And you came to kill!" she exclaimed.

"Or to be killed."

"No! Don Q. will not belie his reputation," she rejoined. "He may yet kill some one to-night—if he dares!" she added suddenly.

The brigand eyed her for a minute.

"There are men allied to brave women, men who are cowards and who choose to be represented on occasions which they themselves fear to face. I have

received a letter bidding me to come here. Do you know anything of it?"

"All, since it was I who wrote it."

The chief shrugged his shoulders. "May I be permitted to inquire—under whose orders?"

She smiled. "I am here alone, as I wrote alone. Hear me, for there is not time to spare." Don Q. made a gesture of polite attention. He was keenly suspicious, though there was a simple urgency of woe in her face that almost compelled belief.

"I will tell you my name—I am Anita del Vilar," she went on, "and you are not Don Q. but——"

The chief flung up a fierce hand. "Hush, not even dead walls must hear it!"

A strange look came over her face.

"I judged rightly! You are the man who once bore—that name. My life is in your hands. Now I know that you will do for me all that I want." She bent near him. "There was once a young girl, loving, happy, and oh, so lovely." Her voice broke. "My little Lucia, my sister. She was mine from the day our mother died. We are of the nobles, as you know, but secretly, 'we stabled the lean horse,' as the saying is—the lean horse, misfortune. He carried us to the verge of ruin, but we hid our troubles well."

Don Q.'s gaze held her; he had stabled that horse himself.

"Then a man, a lover, came to my Lucia. He was ambitious and her fortune meant much to him; but you see it was all gone. The marriage was arranged; then my father could no longer hide the truth." She faltered. "I thought my darling—she was younger than I, señor—would break her heart. Ah, but worst came. They met secretly and

she went away. For a long time we did not know where she was. My father died of grief. Then I got a message from a stranger, and I hurried to Paris, but I found her dead, my little Lucia; dead of want and sorrow, with her lover's letters on her heart." She touched the chief's breast.

He took her hand and kissed it with a fine reverence.

"You, who never saw her dear face, are sorry for her." The girl's voice had the penetrating thrill of a harpstring. "I would have killed Diego Palomoro with my own hands if I could; but I was helpless until I thought of a way."

A prevision of irremediable evil came upon Don Q. He made her a gesture to continue.

"I had one weapon left. Do you blame me that I used it? I knew a secret I learnt seven years ago in a convent in Castille, where I was brought up. I meant to keep it, oh, believe me, I meant to keep it, but——"

"First—how did you learn it?"

"From the Mother Superior of the convent."

A dreadful change passed over the chief's face.

"Enough! You are lying to me!"

She fell on her knees before him.

"Hear me. I swear—let me tell you how I heard it. It was when she could not hide it. She was ill. I was always her favourite, and when she feared delirium, she directed that I alone should stay with her. In the night she wandered, and I—heard—all."

She hesitated, then rushed on.

"I promised her I would never speak. Oh Mother of Heaven, forgive me! Afterwards she gave me the signet ring to bury out of sight, for it

was to her an occasion of mortal sin. I loved her, señor, she was so sad and beautiful, I could not part with it. I kept it for her sake because I loved her."

"Yet you could betray her!"

Doña Anita rocked upon her knees in a passion of sobs. Then suddenly she sprang up, defiant.

"If it were to do again I should do it! A thought came to me that I had one weapon left. You forbade me to whisper that name to these dead walls. What if I have told it to living ears? I was right!" she laughed exultantly. "I went to Diego: I spoke to him of Lucia. He mocked me! Then I told him the secret—your secret."

"Why?"

"Because I knew that by doing so I was securing on my side the fiercest champion in Spain!"

Don Q.'s head fell on his breast. "You might have done the one without the other," he said sadly. "But finish."

"I told him because I knew the man who heard that secret must die. You will kill him?" she cried out. "I boasted to him that it would be his death-sentence."

"And he?"

"He swore on the contrary that I had made his fortune," she wailed.

The chief moved alertly. "Good! He will not share his knowledge, until he first tries to make use of it with me. When did you see him?"

"To-day. He is at his farm, six leagues away, where he came to look over the herd of bulls he bought from——"

"Yes—yes. Farewell, Doña Anita, I wish you had trusted me before you betrayed me."

She clasped his arm. "Kill me! I deserve it! But for Lucia's sake I would do the same again! Kill me!"

Don Q. gently pushed away the clinging hands.

"I cannot deny that you have deserved punishment," he said, "for you have done worse than kill a man; you have perhaps killed a very ancient and noble name. Yet you were mad with your sorrow, and you are but a woman. Farewell, Doña Anita. I go to find this Diego, who has indeed committed frightful crimes—the first, in deceiving and deserting your sister; the second and greater, in learning my name."

The sound of his light footfall had scarcely died away when Doña Anita heard a confusion of voices, a pistol shot, and a cry. She started to her feet, and hid herself in the dim corner by the chimney, drawing the screen closer.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW DON Q. FOUGHT FOR HIS NAME

As Don Q. was stepping from the great gate he stumbled against a rope tied across it. In spite of his fragility, and the fact that he borrowed his strength rather from the spirit than the body, he was not an easy prisoner to capture. He leaped rather than fell into the courtyard, but a stone crashed after him, striking him on the head, yet as he sank down his mind telegraphed danger to his hand, and he fired his revolver at one of the three dim shapes towering above him.

When Don Q. came to himself he found he had been carried back into the great hall and laid within the circle of firelight. His weapons were gone, his hands and feet bound, and the blood was already drying upon his face. At first he half believed it must be a dream, but remembrance roused him thoroughly—was he not fighting for his name?

Now, in all his life Don Q. had never been in bonds before, and it may safely be declared that the danger of his position was entirely swallowed up in the sense of the indignity thus put upon him. Two men stood talking by the fire, while a third lay upon the ground behind him. He could hear faint groans, from which the brigand gathered that his shot had not gone so far astray.

"Impossible!" The exclamation broke loudly from one of the two at the fire. "Why, the man's dead, Heaven knows how long ago!"

"So it was given out," said the other; "but in any case, Nicanor, this fellow will be worth something, for he is undoubtedly Don Q. Did you see how he fought?"

"So would you, my dear Diego, under the same circumstances," laughed Nicanor.

"True, but not so adroitly as he did. This is an expert in the struggle for existence. Come, if he is not sufficiently awake to question we must rouse him."

"If this be really Don Q.," put in Nicanor, "it would be safer to kill him as he lies."

"All in good time. First let us extract the dollars." He stepped across to the brigand and kicked him. "Wake up, rascal, I would speak with you."

The chief opened his eyes and closed them again feebly. He recognized the lean, fine-featured face with its light, sinister eyes as that of Palomoro.

"Come, bandit, you will drowse no longer when you hear it is a question of your treasure. I hold you captive, as you have held many a one I know, and it is your turn to pay ransom."

The chief lay silent.

"Doña Anita lured you here and I followed Doña Anita; only just in time, or you would have escaped us. The fact that you are Don Q. is proven; we have the witness of your features." Diego pulled the brigand roughly up by the collar and held his face to the light. "The *quebranta-huesos* cannot be mistaken for a crow." The other man joined in Palomoro's laughter. "Where have you hidden your hoard."

Don Q., propped against the stool, answered with toneless civility—

"Many men have asked that question."

"Many men have searched for your treasure," retorted Don Diego. "The good fortune of finding it has been reserved for me."

"Perhaps," replied Don Q. "But let us to business. How do you propose to learn where my treasure—presuming I have a treasure—is concealed?"

"By a method you understand—compulsion."

"But how?" the chief's politeness was unaltered. "Will you torture me? Or, it may be, threaten me with death?"

"Your courage is reputed to be unassailable," answered Don Diego, "though I may be driven to try conclusions with you in that way if gentler means fail. But I propose to begin on another basis. I happen to be the lucky holder of a secret belonging to your past life."

The brigand made a contemptuous gesture. "You are credulous, señor."

"*Caramba!* I know it to be true! Has any other bait tempted you into the jaws of a trap? No! But this was successful. As I followed the pretty Anita here, I realized that if you came at her call, whatever gods there are had delivered you into my hands. You must buy our silence—my friend's and mine."

"And what of the gentleman I have been so unfortunate as to wound?" inquired Don Q.

"Manuelo? Pooh! my groom. He is dead by now; you shot too straight. Come, our terms are simple."

"Go tell your secret in the streets of Malaga; you will be none the richer."

"We cannot haggle like a couple of old women in the market-place. Make up your mind. If you

lead us to your treasure we will give you our word of honour as gentlemen to preserve your secret inviolate."

"Señor, pardon me. You would sell your honour? Is it not so?" questioned Don Q., with exceeding suavity. "For my part, I cannot afford to buy it."

"Why?—against your principles?" said Don Diego with angry contempt; "Señor *sequestrador,* who holds to ransom."

"Precisely. It is against my principles. Not as a *sequestrador,* but against my principles as a man of business. I cannot buy that damaged article—your honour."

Don Nicanor burst into oaths; the other man stood deadly still.

"I am about to teach you, brigand," he said icily, "the lesson you have taught many a better man—the fact that you are after all no more than flesh and blood. Strip him, Nicanor." He stooped and plucked out from amongst the heap of wood beside the hearth a bar of iron still imbedded in a broken window-sash. As he thrust it to heat in the flames, there was a movement of the heavy screen, and Doña Anita rushed out from her concealment.

"You would torture him!" she shrieked. "You shall not! You shall not!"

Don Diego's smile was not pleasant to see. "My dear lady, I fear Don Q. has to thank you only for his present position."

"Look at the door—in the doorway!" she screamed.

Both the men swung round, and, taking advantage of the instant, Anita threw herself upon Don

Q. and began to saw at his bonds with a delicate-bladed dagger.

The men pulled her off savagely and dragged her towards the door in spite of her frantic resistance. Of all that the brigand had to endure on that night, perhaps this moment was the worst, while he was forced to look on at the rough handling of this lady.

He heard the men say there was an upper room where they could shut her in. The noise receded. He was alone.

He looked round. Doña Anita's dagger was not to be seen, but his eye fell on the iron bar already hot. He rolled towards the fire, pushed the bar out of the embers with his bound feet, and held the ropes upon his wrists down upon it until they charred and he could jerk them loose. Scarcely conscious of the horrible burns on his hands and wrists, he untied the knots about his ankles and stood up free, unarmed indeed, but yet free. Then he endeavoured to stamp out the fire, but hearing footsteps he flung an armful of damp wood upon the glowing ashes, effectually darkening the hall.

It was Don Diego who entered. "Hullo, how dark it is! Help, help, Nicanor!" he shouted.

For Don Q. was on him like a cat. Springing at his neck from behind, he kicked his knees from under him and brought him heavily to the ground just as Nicanor came running into the hall.

"Robledo, Gaspár, to me! I have the other here," called Don Q.

Nicanor was deceived. He could see nothing but the outstretched form of his friend, and he imagined that the brigand's men had come to the rescue of their chief. He turned to escape. Don Q., snatching Don Diego's knife and pistol, started in pursuit.

Nicanor leaped out across the snow to where his horse was tethered. Cutting his friend's loose, he flung himself upon his own with a yell and a blow.

Hot after him followed Don Q. The night was now full of a pale luminosity, for a white-rimmed moon had swum up over a world that lay a-cold. Some moments were lost in reaching his horse in the wood, and by that time Nicanor was out of sight; but the chief knew his enemy would make for the nearest village, some four leagues distant. If Nicanor once gained its shelter he must escape, carrying with him the desperate secret.

With spur and voice, Don Q. urged his horse forward. The snowbound chase sent no sound up to the dim heaven; a magic circle might have been shutting in these two gasping riders and their passions. But Don Q., being much the lighter man, was gaining surely upon the other. Nicanor, peering back over his shoulder and seeing only one pursuer and that one overtaking him, fired again and again at the figure with the flying cloak bent so closely over his horse's neck.

No shot came back in reply. "He is without a pistol, this brigand," thought Nicanor, and turned at bay, wheeling his blown horse behind a thicket laden with snow. The chief swept nearer and nearer, then his horse seemed to stumble or rear. Don Nicanor could not clearly see what happened, but Don Q. was thrown from his saddle. He lit upon the ground not far from the thicket, and by the impetus of his fall rolled over and over to within a few feet of it.

Don Nicanor, spying through the branches to take good aim, passed for ever from the light and consciousness of earth, for a little tongue of flame licked

upwards from the tumbled figure upon the snow, followed by the smack of the striking bullet, a sound unlike any other in the world.

Instantly the chief was up to run in upon his foe, but Nicanor was hanging dead half among the bushes, his feet still lodged in the stirrups.

"A very simple trick, good Don Nicanor, but it sufficed for you," said the brigand, as he pushed the body to the ground.

Climbing upon his horse, he glanced up at the moon, and saw with satisfaction that by its light he could ride at a hand gallop back along his own tracks. Nicanor's tongue was dumb for ever, but infinitely the more dangerous of his two adversaries remained. So far Don Q. felt things had gone well enough, but the danger to his long hopes and hereditary pride still loomed darkly ahead. Diego was a man of cunning and malevolence, and one who did not lack courage. Perhaps he had not yet recovered consciousness, or he might have departed, taking the secret with him, or most likely of all he was lying in wait for Don Q., whose return he very well knew he might safely count on.

Yet who could say what turn Don Diego's enmity might take? Suppose he recognized the fact that his deepest revenge lay in spreading abroad his knowledge to befoul the honour of that kingly name! At the thought Don Q. drove his horse on, but a cloud drifting up obscured the moon, and in a moment horse and rider were wrapped in a blinding squall of snow. It was impossible to tell the direction in which they were travelling, so for a maddening hour Don Q. plodded slowly on, consumed with impatience and anxiety, keenly alert to every sound, yet benumbed by cold and wind.

In the midst of his despair, he found himself on the mound of Las Lechuzas.

Hurriedly tying up the horse, he groped his way into the building, through the silent passages to the hall. In the dull glow of the fire it seemed empty.

Empty, empty; nothing to be seen but little fitful flames feeling about the freshly piled wood on the hearth! Diego no longer lay where the brigand had left him. Don Q., keeping in cover of the great screen, waited, for it was clear that during his absence his opponent had recovered consciousness.

But the fire languished, and cast long deceptive shadows on the floor and rugged walls. Watching, the chief at length made out something black and round, from which a dull gleam was struck at intervals.

All was very still, save those weird noises that wander for ever in old habitations. The brigand crawled nearer and nearer to the dark object. All at once a flame leaped up, and showed him Don Diego's dark well-groomed head lying within hand reach.

On the brow the death-chill had gathered, and in the strong throat was thrust a dagger. Don Q. felt for the hilt; it was slender and delicately fashioned. Quickly he sought the dead man's right hand; it was empty, though a revolver lay beneath it; but among the fingers of the left he found coiled a strand of long, dark hair.

The chief started up. What, then, was become of Doña Anita? For a moment he forgot to exult that his name was once more safe from that world where people talk. The next, he had kicked the fire into a blaze and looked round.

The girl lay half on the ground, half propped

against the wall, with her hands clenched in her lap, her white face set in a tangle of dark hair, her great black eyes wide.

In an instant Don Q. was beside her.

"Diego shot me," she whispered very faintly. "He wanted to force me to give up your ring as proof—but I saved it." Gently Don Q. took it from her failing fingers. "When I am dead," she went on, "you will perhaps forgive me, and carry me away from this place and lay me in some niche in the sierra, with the pure snow about me, where I can sleep well at last."

An hour before the dawn Don Q. began his journey back to the mountains, and across his saddle-bow, wrapped in her long cloak, he carried Doña Anita to the burial she had desired. Scattered snowflakes struck at him and at his burden, for a wind had arisen; but far away from whence it came one star began to shine and sparkle through the snow-wet night.

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW DON Q. STOOD AT BAY

WINTER was breaking, and the plains were already gay with flowers, when Garth Lalor returned to the *Boca de Lobo* as Don Q.'s guest. An invitation from so uncommon a source might not have been accepted by everyone with the eagerness shown by Garth Lalor. Don Q. wrote that he had need of a friend, and Lalor responded by setting out at once, for he had long ago grown to like Don Q. for many of the remarkable points in his strange character.

Lalor, as will doubtless be remembered, had accompanied Don Q. on that eccentric tour of justice, during which summary vengeance was dealt out to a certain General Don Basilio; and the brigand's conduct had inspired Lalor with unmitigated respect for him, and faith in his promises.

He had already spent nearly a month with the famous *sequestrador,* but during the last couple of weeks his host of the sierra had remained plunged in a mood of melancholy, shot and illuminated by flashes of cold rage. Don Q. was not a man to be questioned, therefore Lalor waited for enlightenment, taking things easily in the meantime according to his nature, and also gaining a full knowledge of the routine of brigand life, with its long monotonies broken at intervals by violent episodes when life and death hung in an even balance.

One morning as Lalor sat on the terrace sunning himself in the brilliant air, Don Q. joined him. Chilly as usual the chief, wrapped in his cloak, his

sombrero pulled low over his brows, sat for a few moments in silence, then he disengaged one meagre hand, and pointing downwards at the men gathered in groups in the valley below, he told a story in his sibilant voice. It was the first break in his silence of several days.

"One of these wolves, these mountain apes," he began sourly, "has dared to play a little part in imitation of a man—of me, in short—with the grotesque result one would expect from such a travesty. As regards the animal himself, it matters not at all. But he has injured me in a degree so monstrous that his blood alone cannot wash out his crime!"

Lalor looked at the chief. He had moved and was hanging over the edge of the terrace with the threatening poise of a hawk, scanning the figures beneath, who, manifestly conscious of the deadly gaze, lay motionless in varied and picturesque attitudes round the fires.

"One, Pablo, has captured and held to ransom a lady of wealthy though not noble family. It came to my knowledge as all events ultimately come, and I descended the mountains and caught the fellow red-handed," the chief went on. "Perhaps, señor, you did me the honour to miss me at the *desayúno* yesterday? I returned, bringing both Pablo and his captive with me. The señorita had been frightened, even maltreated! Psst!" Don Q. emitted a hiss of such contempt and malevolence that Lalor involuntarily rejoiced that it was not directed against himself. "Then I considered what I should do."

Lalor comprehended that those many hours of bleak and scowling silence had been spent by the

brigand in deciding how adequately to punish the wrongdoer. The outcome of these terrible musings appeared to be a letter that Don Q. now unfolded before the young Englishman.

"What do you think of this, señor?" he asked, "I will read it to you, omitting the compliments of greeting with which you are familiar. I address myself to the Governor of the Prison of Castelleno."

"What?" ejaculated Lalor, "not the man whose ears——"

Don Q. bowed in his courtly manner.

"Whose ears I regretted being obliged to add to my little museum up here in the mountains—the same, señor." He began to read—"'Don Q. has the honour to send herewith the person of Pablo Gomez, formerly of his band, who has committed the unpardonable indiscretion of holding to ransom on his own responsibility the Señorita Doña Inez de Lucás. Don Q., as all who acquaint themselves with the great events of the day are aware, has never during his long, memorable and blameless career, held to ransom a lady. Don Q. trusts that His Excellency the Governor of the Prison of Castelleno, will, as a man of honour, clear the name of Don Q. of the stigma cast upon it by the horrible action of the scoundrel, Pablo Gomez, and garrotte the fellow on the highest point of the prison roof in the sight of all the world.' After that the usual greetings of farewell. Does it appear to you, señor, that I have made my meaning plain?"

"Very much so," replied Lalor.

The chief clapped his hands and Robledo came running up the path to the cave. Giving orders to bring Pablo and the señorita into his presence, Don Q. resumed,—

"You must understand, dear friend, that the rabble of the plains are but too glad to soil the record of a man so much better than themselves. I could naturally cause Pablo to be killed in many excellent ways. I could, for instance, blindfold him and request him to walk ten paces forward—the ninth step including a fall of four hundred feet. This little promenade, when explained beforehand to the person of whom there is question, causes a highly unpleasant quarter-of-an-hour, I can promise you, señor."

Lalor dryly assured the chief that he could well believe it.

"But in that case they who hate me in the plains would inevitably accuse me of departing from my rule of never causing annoyance to a lady. For this reason I have resolved to send Pablo to be dealt with by the law of Spain, so that the true story of the matter may reach my revilers."

Lalor opened his lips to speak, but after hesitation forebore. The brigand was not one with whose counsels it was well to meddle uninvited. At the moment a group of men, haling with them a reluctant captive, appeared climbing the path. In front of them walked a handsome girl of, perhaps, twenty years of age. She had the graceful gait of her nation, and the droop of her shapely figure, her extreme pallor, and the appeal in her beautiful eyes seemed to touch the long-chilled heart of the chief.

He rose, and with conspicuous elegance of movement, swept his hat to the ground.

"Señorita, I kiss your feet."

The girl grew whiter as she gazed at the bald-browed vulture aspect of Don Q. She turned to

Lalor, and, reading pity in his glance, she begged him to plead for her.

"There will be no need, señorita," replied Lalor, in halting Spanish, "Don Q. is your best friend."

"I beg you, señorita, to accept my most humble apologies for the indignity with which this miscreant has treated you." The chief pointed to Pablo. "I have written to the Governor of the Prison of Castelleno to deal with him to the utmost severity of the law; while you shall be conducted with all care and tenderness to your family."

"You are about to set me free?" cried the girl.

"Doubtless, you have heard many things of me, Doña Inez," replied Don Q. sadly. "Have those stories ever included one of cruelty or imprisonment imposed upon a woman?"

"No, no, señor. You are good, you deprive me of words!" she faltered. "How can I thank you?"

"Very easily, most beautiful flower. Be good enough to make it well known in the plains that in whatever manner I may deal with men, my bearing towards ladies is above reproach. Cruel falsehoods have been spread about me down below there. You will more than repay any small service I may have been fortunate enough to render you, if you will clear my reputation of the slurs certain unworthy creatures have thrown upon it."

"I will tell them. I thank you with all my heart, señor."

Don Q. turned to Lalor.

"Amigo," he said softly, "you will go with this lady to the lower pass. You can reassure her as these rough ones never can."

On Lalor's return a few hours later to the cave, he found Don Q. in unusually good spirits.

"By this time the *guardias civiles* have charge of our good Pablo," he remarked, "Robledo will see him enter the gates of the prison, and in a day or two will bring to us news of the execution. Perhaps, dear friend, you think I have shown weakness in allowing that rascal to get off so cheaply, considering his crime in causing distress to the señorita, who is indeed as beautiful as rumour declared her to be. But what will you? I, of all persons, cannot afford to lose my good name."

Lalor fully sympathized.

"A good name is like snow, the faintest stain has power to sully it!" The chief shook his head with an air of profound conviction, then, changing his tone—"But the matter is now done with. Come, señor, light your pipe, and let us wander among the flowers of memory. The world has its wonderful histories, but few are more full of romance than that of our old Spain. It pleases me at times to reflect that countless generations have dwelled in those fat plains below us, but that until I came here, these higher gorges of the sierra have been desolate, and have seldom echoed to the voices of midget humanity."

"You have never thought of retiring from the sierra—from your profession?" inquired Lalor.

Don Q., who had been huddled by the fire, sat up. The glancing flames played over him, and never had the contrast between his fragile body and fierce heart been so apparent.

"But, señor, you appear not to comprehend this matter!" he exclaimed, his thin voice taking on the sibilant sound of anger. "Your question is ill-considered. It proves that you have failed to understand the motives which led me to adopt my present

profession. In business, perhaps, as in that of the wine-seller or the dealer in vegetables, which has as its object the amassing of a competence, one hears of persons retiring. But have you ever heard of a poet, an author, an artist retiring?"

Lalor hastened to acknowledge that he had not.

"The same rule applies to me," pursued the chief haughtily. "The excitements of my life and the greatness of my career are as dear to me as ever, and the idea of leaving them is intolerable!

"Also would it suit with my dignity to sue for a pardon?" he resumed more quietly. "And, having got it, to become a mere politician? A man of my eminence cannot disappear. No, señor, the feud between the law and myself will never be ended until I am dead. And when the names, which to-day appear notable in the land, are forgotten, men will still speak of Don Q. My fame and my doings have enriched the Spanish language!"

Lalor knew that the man who spoke thus spoke what he, at any rate, considered the bare truth. Without question the chief meant all that he said. Don Q. would not have bartered his reputation for that of any other man alive. Yet his life was one of constant peril. It was true that during the whole course of his career in the sierra he had never been deprived of his liberty, nor had any one of his untiring enemies of the Civil Guard been able to boast that he had held captive even for an instant the celebrated *sequestrador,* whom they had all pursued for so many long years.

"Señor, have you no fear of capture?" Lalor could not withhold the question.

"Ah, no, my dear friend, none," the thin claw-like fingers were spread to the blaze, "none what-

ever. I shall die at my own time and in my own fashion."

The young author sighed. He had grown almost attached to the strange inhuman outlaw, whose nature, as he now knew, could be touched to such fine issues.

"Why do you sigh?" Don Q. asked in his courteous way.

"Pardon me," exclaimed the young man impetuously, "but who of us can say that luck will for ever be on his side? You are here alone. Those about you are wolves—you have called them so. And wolves will drink each other's blood. Listen to me, England offers a safe retreat. Come there——"

The delicate yellow hand went up to deprecate further urging.

"I thank you, Señor Lalor. As for me, have no fear. When I die, it will be here. And unborn men will fear to linger alone among the sierra, where the great chief of the *sequestradores* lies asleep."

To follow the proper sequence of events one must pass down through the *Boca de Jabili* to the thicket of laurestinus bushes nestling in a romantic gorge among the lower slopes of the sierra. There Robledo left Pablo, bound, while he hid himself on an overhanging ledge, where he lay at his ease in the sun and kept watch on events in the ravine below.

The pair of *guardias civiles,* whose duty it was to patrol that locality, presently rode into view, and with much caution, for treachery is not unknown to the corps, approached the spot where a mysterious note had told them they would find the robber, Pablo

Gomez. All turned out as the note foretold, and Robledo heard one of the men remark—

"The goatherds say Don Q. is the devil, but he does not lie."

The watcher above shook his head dubiously. For his own part he believed that the chief must be playing a very deep game indeed. By taking leisurely short cuts, he kept the Civil Guards and their prisoner in view to the moment when the gates of the prison closed behind them.

His orders were to wait in the town until news of the execution of Pablo should be made public. On the third day reports circulated that Pablo Gomez, the brigand of the sierra, had expiated his many crimes.

Robledo was free to return to the mountains, but one little half hour must still be snatched to further his own affairs. Perhaps those who read may remember a certain Isabelilla with a fine ankle and lustrous eyes, also those dark eyes were lit with lovelight for the ragged, brave, and picturesque Robledo. The thought of her tempted him to delay. It was nightfall when he strolled into a narrow lane to sing a serenade of passion and farewell under a barred window, but a sound of hurrying footsteps coming down the street, Robledo and his guitar were at once swallowed up in the darkness of a neighbouring doorway.

Two men appeared striding swiftly along the line of shadow, but as they drew near Robledo's hiding-place, a shaft of moonlight through a break in the houseroofs caught the half-muffled profile of one of them. Robledo first started and crossed himself, then with a quick, monkey gesture he put out his hand and touched the cloak of this person as he

passed. It felt rough and real enough to thrust all notions of ghosts out of the brigand's mind.

This was no apparition, but Pablo Gomez very much in the flesh.

Robledo comprehended that this portended serious trouble against the whole band of the *sequestradores* in the sierra. He himself could not guess what it might be, but he would hasten back with the news to Don Q., who knew everything, who could defeat every stratagem.

Robledo inserted one lean brown hand behind a bar and drew himself up to the window until a comely, powdered face and his own sun-browned one were close together, and a brief whispering ensued. Two minutes later he dropped down, wiped some powder from his lips, and slid away through the shadows. On the second day he was urging his mule at a speed it had never before attained through the *Boca de Jabili*.

"Well, my child," said Don Q., gently, when Robledo once more stood before him. "You have fulfilled my commands or you would not be here?"

"Yes, lord."

"And the vile Pablo has been garrotted?"

"No, lord."

The chief's livid-lidded eyes flickered ominously at the young man.

"Corpse of a scullion! You have dared to disobey me!"

"No, lord, no! On the third day it was spoken on authority from the prison that Pablo was dead, and that His Excellency the Governor had given fifty pesetas to pay for masses for his soul."

"Go on."

"I desired to see the dead body, and I went with

the crowd to the prison, but none were admitted. So I waited, for it is not good for a poor man to bring news on hearsay to my lord."

The chief nodded impatiently.

"When dark fell I went to the house of my cousin for I was doubtful," Robledo went on with nervousness.

"With a guitar?" sneered the chief venomously.

"It is true, lord." The robber crossed himself, for Don Q.'s knowledge always seemed uncanny. "I carried my guitar in order to make those who met me believe that my service was to a lady's eyes, not to my lord of the sierra."

"And the name of the cousin is Isabelilla, is not that so?"

"Yes, lord." Robledo was apprehensive, but the importance of his news gave him courage. "While I waited, two men came down the street. One was the porter of the prison gate, and the other had the face of Pablo."

A spasm of fury seemed to shake Don Q.

"Ah, infamy!" he whispered half to himself, then louder—"And what did my good Robledo think? That he had seen a ghost?"

"No, lord, for I spoke to my cousin at the window—no more. Isabelilla had heard—for her mother has the washing from the prison of the laces and the linens of her Excellency, Doña Catalina—that one said at the prison that Pablo had been spared, and another executed in his name. That is all!"

Don Q.'s peaked nose sank from sight in the breast of his folded cloak, and he sat brooding in his bird-like attitude for many minutes.

At length. "Robledo."

"Yes, lord."

"You will give this money—it is 500 dollars—to thine Isabelilla."

Robledo bowed and muttered his eager gratitude.

"And you will forget all you have told me."

"It is forgotten, lord."

"Also there is a message for Isabelilla."

"Yes, lord."

"Say to her that if she fails to procure the earliest news of all that passes in the prison, I will cut off the nose of her cousin Robledo. . . . Go!"

Even in the rewards of the fierce, vulture-like chief, there was always the hint of a threat. It was not only characteristic of him, but justified by deep knowledge of the human material he dealt with. Robledo departed into the valley treading very softly. His terrible master knew much, very much, of his relations with the bright-eyed daughter of the laundress of Her Excellency, Doña Catalina.

After this conversation, Lalor, seeing that Don Q. pulled his hat over his brows and returned to brooding over the fire, left the chief to himself. No doubt some treachery was intended, and Lalor hardly wondered at the fact when he recalled a certain story about the ears of the Governor of the Prison of Castelleno, which had been told to him long ago in a *posada* at the foothills, with many gestures of horror and making of signs supposed to avert the evil eye.

During the evening, however, Don Q. became positively gay, and, departing from his usual custom of never drinking any but the thinnest of country wine, broke a bottle or two with Lalor of a flavour seldom tasted by an English palate. He even got

out his guitar and sang in his high, thin voice a forgotten drinking song.

While pouring out another glass of wine he said abruptly—

"The Governor of Castelleno is, in truth, a vain fellow, but I believed in his honour. I have been too generous. Never again, señor, will I trust in the motto of *noblesse oblige.*"

Lalor inquired what he supposed the authorities meant to do.

"They have given Pablo his life on the condition that he betrays me. That, of course, is clear. Pablo Gomez is to lead them here to the *Boca de Lobo!*" he laughed with sibilant mockery. "So the governor dreams of my capture—dreams that Pablo will guide him to my unknown retreat? It is well! For Pablo will find no path to follow. And more, señor, I say to you, that before many days are over, the monks of Castelleno will have grown husky with singing masses for the soul of that very infamous caballero and calumniator, Don Hugo, Governor of the Prison of Castelleno."

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW DON Q. STOOD AT BAY

DAYS passed, and spies departed from the valley and found their way back again; ragged goatherds and charcoal-burners came cringing and crossing themselves into the presence of the chief, who seemed to tear out the inmost soul of each with a brief question or two and the glare of his malignant eyes. Lalor listened, marvelling more and more at the intuition with which Don Q. pierced to the bottom of every man's knowledge, and drew from him details of himself, his neighbours and his surroundings, thus gathering a mass of minute information. He understood that such knowledge being translated meant—power.

News from the plains grew more and more ominous. Stories floated up of infantry arriving and encamping outside the town of Castelleno because the barracks were full. Military manœuvres were publicly discussed, but the force assembled hardly amounted to the number necessary for even a fragmentary rehearsal of the tactics of war. Then in the dusk of one starlit night half-a-dozen messengers followed upon each other's heels with the news that a systematic movement had begun towards the sierra.

In fact, Don Hugo, the Governor of the Prison, had gained from Pablo Gomez a fairly clear knowledge of the topography of the *Boca de Lobo,* the valley in which Don Q. had always found safe re-

treat, baffling the expeditions sent out against him. It was approached by a tunnel-like passage and, as far as the band knew, had no other outlet. The governor boasted that the capture of the great brigand was now but a matter of time. He would be bottled up in his valley and secured by an overwhelming force. After this the governor promised to put him in a cage in the grand Plaza of Castelleno for the crowd to gaze at. Upon the third day he would be garrotted in public with much ceremonial to impress evil-doers.

All these sayings were faithfully carried to Don Q.

"Imagine this animal without honour to whom I sent Pablo!" he exclaimed to Lalor. "Truly I took an overhigh view of humanity! As to my garrotting in public——" he laughed. "Come with me, Señor Lalor, and see how Don Q. begins to stand at bay."

He went out and stood on the edge of the terrace and clapped his hands. The valley was unusually full, for all outlying parties of the band had been called in. From the fires and shelters the men hurriedly collected in a group looking up at their chief.

"Place yourselves in your ranks, my children," the sibilant voice cried softly, and the three-score and odd picturesquely-clad figures fell into line. The chief examined them slowly between his eyelids before he spoke again.

"My children, there are many soldiers and many of the Civil Guard coming from the plains against us. I am told that three hundred hope to stand where you now stand before three days pass. We shall see."

The men broke out into a tumultuous defiance of words and gesticulations. For a moment only,

and then the yellow, meagre hand again imposed silence.

"We are seventy. I shall not need so many to protect me. Every alternate man fall out, and stand together."

They did so. Don Q. looked them over in their turn.

"Thirty-four. That is well," he said. "You will scatter, you will go down into the plains and lose yourselves in the towns. Go where you will, but, my children, remember, lead always honest lives, give none occasion to speak against you. And when I have destroyed the army of the Governor of the Prison of Castelleno, I will in due time send for you again."

The wild faces were painted with astonishment and awe. Who but Don Q. would prepare to resist a powerful force by half disbanding his own? The very act added to the mysterious reputation he already owned.

Next morning a similar scene was gone through. Again the chief carefully examined the men, gave orders for every alternate one to fall out, exhorted them to lead honest lives and dismissed them with the same formula.

By this time Lalor noticed that, with the exception of Robledo, the chief had got rid of all the staunch and most reliable men of his band. It seemed strange that in a moment of such peril, he should retain the least loyal about his person. He ventured presently to ask Don Q. a question on the matter.

"I have my little design," replied the chief, smiling with a cruel inflection of his thin lips. "You perceive that I have already made an im-

mense impression on my people—when they come to hear all, it will be yet deeper. As for these wolves, these jackals rather," he pointed a scornful finger at the fellows remaining in the valley, "they are quite good enough for the purpose I intend them to serve."

"What are we going to do then?"

"Señor," said the chief, turning his bald-browed, peaked face to the young man, "we—that is, you and I—are about to part. Perhaps the hour of my death draws near. Should you be sorry, tell me?"

Lalor caught the sad smile on the other's lips.

"I believe I should," he said.

"Then, señor, if I die yonder, you will grant me a favour I am about to ask of you?"

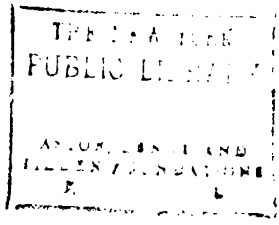
"Yes."

"To-day you go down into Castelleno to a little *posada* where you will dwell in safety until Robledo brings you the last news of me. Listen, Señor Lalor, the favour that I would beg is that you will chronicle, or cause to be chronicled, the manner of my death, you will tell the world how the greatest brigand of all ages turned at bay among his mountains, alone, as he had lived, save for sixteen disloyal men, against huge odds."

"I will do so."

"I have further left you a large sum to engage an adequate illustrator. It would be a pity, señor, that so memorable a fight, as that which is about to take place, should not receive full justice. I have had much pleasure in your society, my dear nephew," Don Q. put out his slender bony hand to take Lalor's, "and I recognize in you one whom the saints sent to a lonely man to record, perhaps, his last exploit, which would have been lost to humanity had none

"Called to Don Hugo to see how a traitor died!"



lived who could add it to the page of Spanish history."

Lalor went down the mountains, leaving Don Q. with a priest the chief had caused to be fetched from the little chapel of San Pedro. For Don Q., in view of his possible death, desired to confess and to receive absolution from the hands of the trembling father.

The young Englishman took up his abode in a *posada* on the outskirts of Castelleno, where he waited for nearly a week, listening to the townspeople discussing news from the sierra, which was sensational and contradictory, and also the diversion they expected from staring at Don Q. when he should be exhibited to the public gaze in a cage on the Plaza! Lalor heard in silence, knowing well that if ever they gazed upon the fierce chief, it would be upon his dead body.

One afternoon a young woman touched him on the arm and raising her handsome eyes to his—"You have heard of Isabelilla?" she said, laying an indicative finger on her own breast and pausing a moment for his acknowledgment.

Lalor bowed and made a suitable reply.

She went on to say that the hospitality of the poor dwelling of her mother, who was a laundress, was open to him if he would follow her, for there was one come from the mountains who desired to speak with the señor.

She moved off at once, and Lalor followed. At the house he found Robledo. The young brigand was very pale under his sunburn.

Isabelilla waited on them. Lalor has since said she was the handsomest woman he had ever seen. As up to the date of that memorable supper three

men had been stabbed for her sake, his opinion probably only did her justice.

During the meal, which was made up of an excellent *puchero,* beans and fruit, Lalor asked no questions. After it, he lit a cigarette, and inquired how Don Q. fared.

Robledo shook his head.

"I will tell the señor the story."

And he told it, backing his words with look and gesture, till Lalor felt he saw the scenes described.

Robledo told of the final look at the deserted valley of the *Boca de Lobo,* of the march to the last fastness of the brigands on an isolated peak surrounded by precipices on every side, and joined only to the mass of the sierra by a narrow bridge of living rock. Here was situated one of the dwelling caves of Don Q., and the spot was fortified by sangars craftily constructed to dominate the approach of the long isthmus.

"My lord and I walked last, for those others were not willing to go to the Punta de Lanza," said Robledo.

"But why?" Lalor asked in surprise. "It could never be taken."

"True, señor. But also one could not run away from it. Therefore those fifteen moved slowly."

He spoke of a man who tried to desert, and whom he and a companion had hurled from the cliff, and of shepherding the remainder across the rocky bridge. Having completed the preparations, a characteristic fit of gloom fell upon Don Q. The last scout had been withdrawn, the bridge strewn with stones and boulders to make the footing treacherous. All was ready. Two days of waiting followed, while they lay cut off from all the world.

Two blue golden days, that showed the glories of the sierra above, and far beneath the peaceful smoke rising from scattered *chozas,* and the haze that clung round distant towns on the warm and drowsy plain.

"Thus we waited watching, my lord and I and those fourteen, for the coming of three hundred." The young Spaniard stopped and sat musing with frowning brows, until Isabelilla, growing impatient, laid her arm across his shoulder. He started slightly and resumed his tale.

Once or twice, he said, the echo of a shot rang from gorge to gorge. And at last came a dawn which showed the enemy advancing. Don Q. had supplied each man with three loaded magazine rifles, bidding them reserve their fire until he gave the signal.

"My lord lay beside me in the trench," Robledo told it with pride, "and we saw that none of our foes were quick to step first upon the bridge, till a tall captain thrust out of the crowd. He had a white face under big black eyebrows, and he drove a man before him with his naked sword. It was Pablo. My lord laid his cheek to the rifle and it yelped in my ear. Pablo twirled round, screaming, and seized the captain about the middle. They twisted on the bridge as strong men twist in a grapple, and in a moment they reeled over the edge together.

"Then our great lord leaped upon a high rock, where all could behold him, and called to Don Hugo to see how a traitor died! Señor, I shut my eyes, I could hear the bullets chipping upon the rocks round my lord, I almost felt the weight of his body as it fell," Robledo rubbed himself reminiscently. "But it was only a sore thrust in the side from

the butt of my lord's rifle—I doubt but it broke a rib or two—for he was angry. 'Fool! can they kill *me?*' he said.

"A great battle followed. The slaughter upon the narrow path was terrible. The troops tried to rush it many times, but we shot them down. The vultures' wings came between us and the sun, casting their shadows on the dead. Still we held off the soldiers. My lord was everywhere—passing from trench to trench without fear.

"Shouts there were, señor, and many screaming above the loud rattling of the bullets. Men and muskets tossed like rags before a wind as they pitched into the chasm. Death I have seen many a time, señor, but not like that," the young fellow shuddered.

"By midday the Governor drew off his people, and sat down to wait until starvation should begin to tell upon our courage. But though only a single man among us was wounded, those evil ones began to grumble among themselves, and concoct plans for betraying the chief.

"But one cannot deceive him, señor. When night fell he called them from the trenches, and read their hearts as a priest reads his book. They denied their treachery with oaths. Then my lord said if any would still follow him and fight, let them stand out on his side."

Isabelilla, crouched by the young robber, gazed up at him with blazing eyes.

"How many stood on his side? Tell me," she said, husky with emotion.

"But one only."

"And that one? I know him! It was you, my

Robledo!" exclaimed the girl, and she flung her arms round him in a fierce caress.

"My lord laughed," Robledo crossed himself. "He laughed, but I feared his laughter. He drove those others from the cave, and bade them live or die as they would. For a while he sat silent, señor, and then he told me to follow him. We crept in the darkness over the peak, and down upon the other side, and my lord led me by goat-tracks for a long time, and we came at length to a hole, and he bade me enter. In truth, I feared to enter—but also I feared my lord.

"In a little time my lord lit a lantern. We were in a tunnel under the bridge of rock, and it grew smaller till we crawled as a wild cat crawls through the underbrush, and my breathing came hard. I know not how long we crept through the heart of the mountains, my head was bursting, and I vowed an offering to the patron saint of hunters (for when I am not a brigand, señor, I lead hunting-parties to shoot the ibex), if I ever escaped to the free air again. At the last I found myself lying in a hollow of deep grass with the good wind blowing over me.

"The moon was out, and through a screen of bushes we could see the bridge and the peak. The soldiers were flying a white flag and taking their wounded from the bridge, and a white flag came up out of the trenches on the Punta de Lanza. I feared for the anger of my lord. But he only laughed very softly, and pointed to one who lay on his face beside the end of the path and held talk with some of the Civil Guard."

"They were betraying the peak—your own men?"

"Yes, señor. But the people of the Governor feared treachery, and would not pass over. In the

end the Civil Guards rushed across led by one Moruno, whom I know—there are men of spirit in the Civil Guard," Robledo remarked generously—"and by degrees nearly all the troops passed over and swarmed upon the Punta de Lanza, searching for my lord. Then I found that my lord was gone from beside me."

"Had gone!" exclaimed Lalor.

Robledo held up his hand with much the gesture of his old master.

"Listen, señor. Don Hugo himself passed over, for I saw him. Indeed, when they knew the surrender was complete all would have gone to look at the cave of Don Q., for never before in all the history of the sierra has any expedition found a dwelling of my lord's. So I thought of these things within myself and wondered what my lord would do, when I was shaken by a horrible noise. The mountain vomited a leaping flame and trembled with the pain of its torment. Great stones and rocks were hurled upwards, and for many minutes the voices that my lord of the mountains called to his aid, rang and roared in the sierra that is his."

Lalor felt his own face pale. "Go on," he urged.

"I could hear men stumbling and groaning and crying on the saints. And then, señor, I think I slept, for I was weary. When the sun rose I wakened and my lord was standing beside me in the thicket and bade me look down. I looked. Señor, it was a wonderful sight! The bridge was gone, and there upon the Punta de Lanza, upon the crags we had defended only yesterday, half an army was clinging, able neither to go forward, because of the precipices nor to return back because of the broken path across the chasm.

"After I had looked a long time, my lord spoke. 'Robledo,' he said, 'you see that none may ever triumph over me. Tell that in the plains. Many will say I am dead. You alone know I am not. Go to Castelleno and tell but two only—the señor Lalor, and your Isabelilla. If you tell the secret to any other in Spain, I will know.'"

"And your lord, where is he?" questioned Lalor.

Robledo shook his head obstinately.

"I will tell my story to the end," he answered. "My lord and I sat together in the hollow to rest, and my lord said I should not see him again for a long time. 'Go you and marry your Isabelilla, and be happy if you can,' he said. 'But I do not think you will be so, for that woman has a fierce heart. And you had better sell your guitar or bury it, Robledo, for men do not serenade their wives, and such a wife as yours will not allow you to serenade others.' So spoke my lord."

Isabelilla sighed in the silence.

"My lord was the wisest of men," she murmured.

"And have you no message for me?" asked Lalor in some disappointment.

"Yes, señor," Robledo took up a package from a corner. "My lord said—'Tell the señor that though for the time men think me dead, I live still. Tell him that I have bequeathed to him a little autobiography of my life, which—if none hear of me again within a year—he will, for my sake, offer to the consideration of an English publisher, in order that the world may know a little more of one of its greatest and most blameless men.'"

THE END.

By LOUIS BECKE

Mr. Becke's work is stamped by vigor of expression and an intensely dramatic imagination.

BY REEF AND PALM and HIS NATIVE WIFE.

Illustrated. 12mo. Cloth, $1.25.

THE EBBING OF THE TIDE.

12mo. Cloth, $1.25.

RODMAN THE BOAT-STEERER, AND OTHER STORIES.

RIDAN, THE DEVIL.

THE TAPU OF BANDERAH.

YORKE, THE ADVENTURER.

HELEN ADAIR.

CHINKIE'S FLAT, AND OTHER STORIES.

BREACHLEY—BLACK SHEEP.

GERRARD.

Large 12mo. Cloth, gilt top, $1.50 each.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURE OF JAMES SHERVINTON.

Illustrated. 8vo. Cloth, $1.50.

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

CADETS OF GASCONY

Illustrated by Anna W. Betts. $1.50

"Mr. Stevenson begins early to involve his hero in a tangle of difficulties, knows how to keep the reader in suspense, and how to give his work a certain spirit."—*New York Tribune.*

"There isn't a dull page. . . . 'Romance pure and simple' describes the two stories in 'Cadets of Gascony,' and the romance is served up in a delightfully thrilling manner."—*Los Angeles Herald.*

AT ODDS WITH THE REGENT

With frontispiece by Anna W. Betts. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50

"The tale is well worth reading. It opens in a most interesting manner, with some desperate sword play against a historical cut-throat—Cartouche—and half a dozen of his rogues, in a street of Paris at the time of the regency, when the Duc de Richelieu was at the height of his career as a heart-breaker and the especial lover of Louise de Valois."—*Brooklyn Eagle.*

"It deserves a place among the best of the recent historic novels, and will live no doubt long after the present vogue has become a thing of the past. It is a pleasure to read a romance of the past that is not filled with blood-curdling deeds after the style of the 'shilling shocker,' for Mr. Stevenson has written a story that appeals to the best side of one's nature. He has characterized noble men and gentle women, who played fair always and were always true to themselves and the best of human impulses. The 'Old Regime,' as he pictures it, was a charming era when men bartered life freely, but held honor and plighted word dearer than existence. Altogether the story is good as to tone, artistic development of the plot, and finished style."—*St. Louis Globe-Democrat.*

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.

At the Time Appointed

By A. MAYNARD BARBOUR

Colored Frontispiece by Marchand - - Postpaid, $1.50

The Washington Post.

"A good mystery that stimulates the imagination and excites the deepest interest."

Doylestown Intelligencer.

"A volume that once started will be read through to the the end. It has thrills galore, unexpected situations, mysteries enough—in fact, it's the real thing."

St. Paul Dispatch.

"A study in character, and a very unusual, original love story."

Pittsburg Dispatch.

"A stirring and dramatic love story."

By same Author

That Mainwaring Affair

Illustrated. Postpaid, $1.50

New York Life.

"Possibly in a detective story the main object is to thrill. If so, 'That Mainwaring Affair' is all right. The thrill is there, full measure, pressed down and running over."

New York Town Topics.

"The book that reminds one of Anna Katherine Green in her palmiest days. . . . Keeps the reader on the alert, defies the efforts of those who read backwards, deserves the applause of all who like mystery."

Denver News.

"The reader will be a good guesser, indeed, if he solves this mystery before the author does it for him. A pleasant love interest runs through the pages."

Publishers : J. B. Lippincott Company : Philadelphia

JACK RAYMOND.

By E. L. VOYNICH.

12mo. Cloth, $1.50; paper, 50 cents.

"The strongest novel that the present season has produced."—*Pall Mall Gazette*, London.

"Wonderful and terrible; wonderful in its intellectual effect, terrible for the intensity of feeling effects."—*Boston Courier*.

"One of the uniquely interesting stories of the year."—*The World*, New York.

SISTER TERESA.

By GEORGE MOORE.

12mo. Cloth, $1.50; paper, 50 cents.

"A psychological study of extraordinary power, revealing the fineness of George Moore's literary methods."—*Philadelphia Press*.

"Absorbing to the end as a narrative, 'Sister Teresa' is also a remarkable exhibit of finished thought and skill."—*New York World*.

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA.

PIGS IN CLOVER

BY "FRANK DANBY"

8vo. Decorated cloth, $1.50.

"By far the most powerful and searching piece of fiction of the year."—*The Bookman.*

"Has a vigor like that Charles Reade used to show."—*Buffalo Commercial.*

"A powerful society and political romance which is still more powerful as a novel of character."—*Brooklyn Eagle.*

"The most effective realistic novel of a decade."—PROFESSOR GUY CARLETON LEE.

"The book is written with insight, sincerity of purpose, and rugged virility."—*The New York Commercial Advertiser.*

"One of the most powerful and sustained stories read in many months."—DR. HARRY THURSTON PECK.

"A novel of unusual power, brilliant, and full of insight into character. It is a book to read."—*Detroit Free Press.*

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA

By MARIE CORELLI

Marie Corelli has many remarkable qualities as a writer of fiction. Her style is singularly clear and alert, and she is the most independent of thinkers and authors of fiction; but her principal gift is an imagination which rises on a bold and easy wing to the highest heaven of invention."—*Boston Home Journal.*

BARABBAS.

12mo. Buckram, $1.00. Also a limited edition, illustrated with photogravures made by Goupil, of Paris, from drawings by the famous French artist Marchetti. Set in new type, handsomely printed, and bound with a special design in gold. $3.50, net. With frontispiece in colors, $4.00, net. Postage, 17 cents extra.

VENDETTA.

12mo. Buckram, 75 cents.

THE SORROWS OF SATAN.

With frontispiece. 12mo. Buckram, $1.50.

CAMEOS.

12mo. Buckram, $1.00.

THE MURDER OF DELICIA.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; buckram, $1.00.

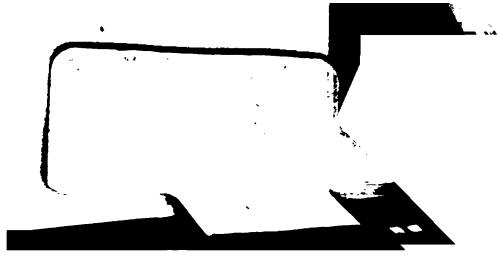
THE MIGHTY ATOM.

12mo. Paper, 50 cents; buckram, $1.25.

BOY: A SKETCH.

With frontispiece. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

JANE and THE MODERN MARRIAGE MARKET.

12mo. Cloth, $1.25.

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA